

# *Special Edition* BULLETIN



Psychedelics and Education  
Spring 2014

**“This is a great day.  
The merits of a  
rigorous scientific  
trial have finally  
trumped politics.”**

**—University of Arizona  
researcher Dr. Sue Sisley,  
*The Los Angeles Times*,  
March 14, 2014**



*Sue Sisley, M.D.*

## U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Approves Study of Marijuana for PTSD, Marking Historic Shift in Federal Policy

On March 14, 2014, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services granted permission for MAPS to purchase research-grade marijuana from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) for our planned study of marijuana for symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in 70 U.S. veterans.

MAPS has been working for over 22 years to start marijuana drug development research, and this is the first time we have been granted permission to purchase marijuana from NIDA, the sole provider of marijuana for federally regulated research in the United States.

The study was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on April 28, 2011, and by the University of Arizona Institutional Review Board on October 25, 2012.

The PHS review process exists only for marijuana, and not for research into any other Schedule I drug. Researchers and veterans' advocacy organizations are now calling on the Obama administration to eliminate the redundant PHS review process, clearing obstacles for other research on the marijuana plant as a potential prescription medicine.

**“When it comes to researching the medical potential of Schedule I drugs, privately funded medical marijuana drug development research has been the last domino to fall. We are working to expand the options doctors have to treat their patients, but we need the support of our federal agencies.”**

**—MAPS Founder Rick Doblin, Ph.D.**

### About the study

**Goal:** Explore the safety and effectiveness of smoked or vaporized marijuana for symptoms of PTSD

**Subjects:** 70 U.S. military veterans with chronic, treatment-resistant PTSD

**Method:** Double-blind, placebo-controlled

**Investigator:** Dr. Sue Sisley

**Location:** University of Arizona, Phoenix, AZ

### In the Media



**The New York Times**

**Los Angeles Times**

**ArmyTimes**



**nature**



**The Washington Post**

**San Francisco Chronicle**

**HIGH TIMES**





**MAPS**  
MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSOCIATION FOR PSYCHEDELIC STUDIES

Founded in 1986, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) is a **501(c)(3) non-profit** research and educational organization that develops medical, legal, and cultural contexts for people to benefit from the careful uses of psychedelics and marijuana.

MAPS furthers its mission by:

- Developing psychedelics and marijuana into prescription medicines.
- Training therapists and working to establish a network of treatment centers.
- Supporting scientific research into spirituality, creativity, and neuroscience.
- Educating the public honestly about the risks and benefits of psychedelics and marijuana.

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# From the Desk of Rick Doblin, Ph.D.



Rick Doblin, Ph.D.

AS I WRITE THIS INTRODUCTION to our special theme edition *Bulletin* on Psychedelics and Education, it's been 28 years since I founded the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) in April 1986. Over that period of time, most of our communications with MAPS members and the general public have been about the struggles of the day. We primarily report on the progress—or in our early years, lack of progress—that we are making towards our mission of mainstreaming the medical and other beneficial uses of psychedelics and marijuana and creating a post-prohibition world. These essential, dramatic, and time-bound dispatches from MAPS' front lines tell a remarkable and gradually unfolding story of social transformation. Like the daily newspaper, however, the bulk of MAPS' communications will rarely ever be read again, save perhaps by future historians trying to better understand how we managed to obtain FDA approval for the therapeutic uses of psychedelics and marijuana in the midst of global prohibition.

As a counterpoint to the ephemeral nature of most of our communications, we've developed these special theme issues of the *MAPS Bulletin* focusing on the contributions of psychedelics and marijuana to various broad areas of modern life including science, art, sexuality, creativity, psychology, ecology, and now education. In January 2014, we also released the anthology *Manifesting Minds*, in which we've collected some of the best articles from our theme issues that we've published over the years.

It is with pride and pleasure that we now present for your

thoughtful and leisurely consideration this special theme issue of the *MAPS Bulletin* on Psychedelics and Education. While the word “psychedelic” generally brings to mind a certain type of unusual experience of transitory nature, the word “education” implies learning that persists over longer periods of time. Education can be the consequence and outcome of psychedelic experiences, just as lasting personality growth and transformation can be the outcome of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy.

MAPS' challenge is to help our culture appreciate psychedelics' immense potential. We encourage society to permit psychedelics to emerge from the underground by demonstrating in multiple ways that their unique acute effects are only part of the story—and in many ways the smaller part of the story—and that their educational and therapeutic benefits can persist over time. This special theme issue is one of the many communication tools we're using to focus attention on how benefits linger after psychedelic experiences fade, rather than on how psychedelics can dazzle, frighten, soothe, and mystify.

This special theme edition of the *MAPS Bulletin* contains articles about how we teach future psychedelic psychotherapists, which educational paths to take when embarking on a career in psychedelic science or medicine, and how students and new community organizations are working to end the global war on drugs. We've also included updates on our psychedelic harm reduction program, an overview of psychedelic education on the Web and social media, intimate personal reflections on psy-



chedelics as educational tools from both a police cadet and a former prisoner, and more.

Preparing these special issues about enduring themes is a refreshing contrast to MAPS' primary focus on strategy and tactics in both scientific and political contexts. We hope you enjoy pondering the deeper issues raised by the authors of the articles in this *Bulletin*. We also hope that you are inspired to engage with renewed energy in our shared struggle to mainstream psychedelics and marijuana at this time of great need and opportunity. With your continued support of MAPS, we'll work together to build a healthier, more spiritual world.

*Rick Doblin*

Rick Doblin, Ph.D.

**MAPS Founder and Executive Director**



Geneva Shanti  
photo credit: Kyer Wiltshire

## COVER ARTISTS

**Front cover: Dr. Alexander "Sasha" Shulgin's Home Laboratory**  
by Geneva Shanti  
**Black-and-White**  
**Digital Photograph**

Geneva Bumb Shanti has been dedicated to the art and science of photography for over 20 years. Visual ethnography and the psychology of intrapersonal relationships are her two main sources of inspiration.

Shanti is motivated by a desire to engage and inspire her audience into personal action. She has gained a strong reputation as a professional and fine art photographer during the last 18 years, specializing in documentary and environmental portraiture.

Shanti has received numerous awards and her photographs have been recognized, published, and collected throughout the world. Geneva is currently working on a new multi-platform project documenting the professionals legitimizing medical advances of psychedelics. She resides in Sonoma County. More on her current project Sublime Visions: Explorers of the Edge of Consciousness can be found at [sublime-visions.org](http://sublime-visions.org).



Jonathan Carmichael

**Back cover: Night Garden**  
by Jonathan Carmichael  
**24" x 16"**  
**Inkjet on BFK Rives**

Jonathan Carmichael has been working professionally as a commercial, event and fine art photographer for many years. Jonathan's fine art photography generally focuses on low light landscapes and melancholy portrait-based images.

Jonathan gained his BA from Monash University in 1999, and is currently studying at PSC (Photographic Studies College). If there were a theme to his fine art work it would be a space where technological development has come to a point of decline where the environment has initiated to reclaim its space once again.

The Night Garden images take a voyage through the wonder of a master garden lit by moonlight. Gardens are magical spaces with a profound sense of serenity that can enhance our perception and remind us of who we are. We all know as the seasons change, so does the garden; but it changes even more radically in the illumination of moonlight. Night Garden explores a side of the garden less familiar to most of us but with a "pinch of the psychedelic." Additional work and sales information at [darkspaces.com.au](http://darkspaces.com.au).



**Help Sasha and Ann Shulgin pay their bills!** In 2014, Sasha's caregiving expenses alone will approach \$132,000. A donation of any amount is a meaningful way to acknowledge the contributions that the Shulgins have made.

To donate, visit [shulginresearch.org/home/donate](http://shulginresearch.org/home/donate). Thank you for your generous support.

# MDMA-Assisted Psychotherapy: A View from Both Sides of the Couch

NAFTALI HALBERSTADT, PH.D.



*Naftali Halberstadt, Ph.D.*

I ADMIT AT THE OUTSET that I am much more comfortable reporting on correlation coefficients and treatment fidelity than writing in the first person about my own experiences—but isn't this the essence of our hopes for MDMA-assisted psychotherapy: to encourage our clients to move outside the limited and limiting zone of comfort they have demarked for themselves in order to cope with their PTSD; to experience and embrace the thoughts, emotions, sensations, and behaviors they have cloistered themselves from for fear of being overwhelmed and losing the tenuous control they have maintained since their traumatic experience.

When I think about what motivated me to become a subject in MAPS' therapist training study, I remember an event many years ago when I first began training as an amateur singer. My teacher suggested that I adopt a model, a singer whose voice I admired, to listen to often and form a mental representation that could guide me from the inside as my teacher guided me from the outside. When I told her of my choice, she responded, "Oh, anyone but Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau!" His sonorous baritone, articulation, dramatic sensitivities, and range of color and expression defied modeling and would only, she said, cause me much frustration.

I approached the MDMA therapist training trial in which I was to participate in the same spirit. I had by then already been through a training workshop to become one of the therapist

investigators in MAPS' Israeli study of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for PTSD, but still, I wanted a model to internalize which would help me carry out a type of therapy quite different than I was used to. It could well be that I chose the "Fischer-Dieskau team" of MDMA-assisted therapists for my model, but nonetheless, I travelled to South Carolina in hopeful anticipation of bringing a bit of Michael and Annie Mithoefer with me back to Beer Yaakov.

I approached my own experience with a mix of trepidation and excitement. Michael and Annie had long since won my confidence and I knew I wanted to make this journey in their company. They jumped right in to hear and validate my doubts, fears and hesitations, never for a moment implying "there's no turning back now"—even after two transatlantic trips separated by 11 months. Their calm and gentle encouragement helped me to truly look forward to what was to come. In just one evening at their home in South Carolina, I had already learned a whole lot about MDMA-assisted treatment that was not to be found in any practice manual.

The morning of my first experiential session arrived, and it wasn't long before I had another observation to be jotted down for my future sessions on the other side of the couch: I found taking MDMA in pill form somewhat unsettling. For me, a pill as the medium of delivery seemed to be an abrupt, all or nothing affair: take the dose, then wait for onset (or not, in the case



*I approached my own experience with a mix of trepidation and excitement. Michael and Annie had long since won my confidence and I knew I wanted to make this journey in their company. They jumped right in to hear and validate my doubts, fears and hesitations, never for a moment implying ‘there’s no turning back now’—even after two transatlantic trips separated by 11 months.”*

of a placebo). Nevertheless I took it, and we settled in for the day’s journey.

As it turned out, my first experience was a placebo. This made it easy to be in the dual role of trainee and participant. I largely succeeded in maintaining a “participant observer” stance—learning about the treatment while not squandering the rare opportunity for my own introspection and healing in the company of expert guides. The placebo day turned out to be a magnificent one of learning and observation. Had the trial ended here I would already have been the better for it. But now I knew that the real thing awaited.

My MDMA experience was absorbing to the point of mocking any conceit of “participant observation.” I experienced onset anxiety, but at the ever-wise suggestion and encouragement of Annie and Michael, rather than trying to repel it, I met it, breathed into it, and embraced it. At one point I became concerned with deliberating over whether or not to accept the offer of a top-up dose. I clearly remember the moment I realized I was frittering away a precious opportunity by being less inside the experience. The anxiety yielded to an exhilarating sensation that at the time I likened to hydroplaning—water has always been for me the element of freedom and flow. This experience sensitized me to the possibility that my future clinical trial patients might face the same choice.

Since my MDMA session, I have reflected a lot on how

I used the session and how I would try to do so were another opportunity to come along. My complete immersion in the session allowed me to walk away with a clearer image of how to be present with and for a client during their experience, and I felt more prepared to respond to what I would encounter as a therapist in an MDMA study.

★

Back in Israel, I awaited my opportunity to make the transition to “the other side of the couch.” For me, there are two elements of the treatment protocol that are notably different from the way in which I usually give treatment. First, the treatment calls for the involvement of two therapists, rather than one. My experience doing psychological treatment has largely been limited to single rather than co-therapy, though I sometimes do co-lead mind-body skills groups. This was no small shift in *modus operandi* to be sure, and I was truly happy for the chance to work alongside a colleague who shares my passion for pushing the therapeutic envelope, one who would bring with them skills and attitudes complementary to those that I would be bringing to the treatment.

The treatment protocol is also built upon a “less directive approach” than that to which I am accustomed. As a fairly structured cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) therapist, I initially felt somewhat pushed out of my strike zone. In the process of



trying to understand what this really meant in practice, I found Dr. Michael Mithoefer's excellent analysis, "MDMA-Assisted Psychotherapy: How Different is it from Other Psychotherapy?" (2013).

*At first glance, MDMA-assisted psychotherapy looks very different from any conventional treatment: Participants lying on a futon, sometimes with eyeshades and headphones listening to music with male and female therapists sitting on either side for at least eight hours.*

In his analysis, Dr. Mithoefer explains the seven elements which together create a treatment that is "stimulating access to the individual's innate, universal healing capacity" (which I hope would be an axiom for anyone in therapeutic endeavors). Some of these elements made sense to me already upon beginning the therapist training, such as Cognitive Restructuring, Anxiety Management, and Exposure Therapy. Others I had to work more to understand, such as Working with the Multiplicity of the Psyche. As I entered my first experience as an MDMA-assisted psychotherapist, it's clear to me that both my active participation and my internal efforts to integrate the therapeutic philosophy into my own vernacular prepared me well for what I was about to do.

My MDMA experience emphasized a truth that I aspire to both in therapy sessions and in the rest of my life: Trust the process. In MDMA-assisted treatment, trusting the process is absolutely critical. Trying to force or overly direct the content or unfolding of a therapy session violates a cardinal principle of this type of therapy: that healing must be self-directed. Yes, we can facilitate the process, but in the end the healing guides itself. In this sense, MDMA-assisted treatment reminds me of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), a psychotherapy technique that heals while allowing the client's brain to go where it needs to go. So, too, with MDMA-assisted treatment. Drawing this parallel to the non-directedness of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy was very helpful as I began administering MDMA-assisted psychotherapy.

Another therapeutic realization that was driven home during my own MDMA-assisted experience was the importance of trust, security, and a sense of partnership in the therapeutic context. Particularly important in the context of PTSD treatment, this is a model of interpersonal interaction that needs to be (re)learned by the PTSD sufferer. A hallmark of the chronic post trauma victim is the belief that the world and much of what and who occupies it are dangerous. One of the first difficulties therapists encounter when treating PTSD sufferers is winning their trust, helping them let their guard down, and finding a safe place in their world—even if that safe place is only imaginary at first.

Co-therapy, as it is built into the MDMA-assisted protocol, can greatly enhance this therapeutic element, however its ability

to do so cannot be taken for granted. Treatment teams must be carefully chosen, and they must be given ample time to become greater than the sum of their parts.

It was a stroke of great fortune to have been assigned to work with Keren Tzarfaty as my co-therapist. It was clear to me very quickly that in Keren I had someone who was secure enough in her therapeutic skin to dance the co-therapist two-step with grace and style, and to do so in the best interest of our client. Like a Bach fugue our vocal lines support each other: now as melody, now as accompaniment, always in harmony.

At the time of this writing, we have just completed our first treatment, which turned out to be a placebo. As in my own placebo experience, we ventured to

create a therapeutic experience which was in every other way identical to the full dose MDMA treatment. The full post-trial evaluation still awaits, but there is no doubt to me that the subject walked away from this stage with certain improvements, certain re-

alizations about his own healing capacities, certain hopes that he now dares to entertain. A bond between us—both between the therapists and the subject, and between the therapists—has been created that will soon be reinvested in a full-dose trial, one that I believe will facilitate a much deeper healing and learning. 🌀

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Mithoefer, M. (2013). MDMA-Assisted Psychotherapy: How Different is it from Other Psychotherapy? *MAPS Bulletin*, 23(1).

**Naftali Halberstadt, Ph.D.**, earned his Ph.D. in Cognitive Psychology from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is a senior CBT therapist and supervisor at the Hadassah University Medical Center in Jerusalem and directs a CBT training program for therapists from the ultra-orthodox sector in Jerusalem. His work in CBT, and as a Mental Health Officer in the Israel Defense Forces, motivated him to develop a Psycho-Trauma Response Program for The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC) in Israel, which he directed from 2002–2008. This nation-wide initiative provided individual and community-based services and professional training. From 2008–2012 he was director of the Training Center for Mind-Body Skills, closely associated with the U.S.-based Center for Mind-Body Medicine (CMBM). Naftali is a member of the CMBM International Training Faculty. International humanitarian relief is central to Naftali's professional identity. He has been part of a team of trauma experts sent to train professionals in Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the Tsunami disaster, provided consultation to professionals in Louisiana in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, and was part of a team of mental health experts sent to train professionals in Haiti. Since 2012, Naftali has been the lead psychologist for a USAID-funded, AJJDC project to develop psycho-social disaster readiness in Indonesia. Naftali lives in Jerusalem with his wife and children. He can be reached at [nhalberstadt@gmail.com](mailto:nhalberstadt@gmail.com).

# Treating Social Anxiety in Autistic Adults with MDMA-Assisted Therapy: An Interview with Nick Walker

IN CONVERSATION WITH ALICIA DANFORTH, PH.D.



Nick Walker

**Alicia Danforth, Ph.D. (AD):** What is your definition of autism?

**Nick Walker (NW):** Autism is a genetically based human neurological variant. The complex set of interrelated characteristics that distinguish autistic neurology from non-autistic neurology is not yet fully understood, but current evidence indicates that the central distinction is that autistic brains are characterized by particularly high levels of synaptic connectivity and responsiveness. This tends to make the autistic individual's subjective experience more intense and chaotic than that of non-autistic individuals: On both the sensorimotor and cognitive levels, the autistic mind tends to register more information, and the impact of each bit of information tends to be both stronger and less predictable.

Autism is a developmental phenomenon, meaning that it begins *in utero* and has a pervasive influence on development, on multiple levels, throughout the lifespan. Autism produces distinctive, atypical ways of thinking, moving, interaction, and sensory and cognitive processing. One analogy that has often been made is that autistic individuals have a different neurological “operating system” than non-autistic individuals.

According to current estimates, somewhere between one and two percent of the world's population is autistic. While the number of individuals diagnosed as autistic has increased continually over the past few decades, evidence suggests that this increase in diagnosis is the result of increased public and professional awareness, rather than an actual increase in the prevalence of autism.

Despite underlying neurological commonalities, autistic individuals are vastly different from one another. Some autistic individuals exhibit exceptional cognitive talents. However, in the context of a society designed around the sensory, cognitive, developmental, and social needs of non-autistic individuals, autistic individuals are almost always disabled to some degree—sometimes quite obviously, and sometimes more subtly.

The realm of social interaction is one context in which autistic individuals tend to consistently be disabled. An autistic child's sensory experience of the world is more intense and chaotic than that of a non-autistic child, and the ongoing task of navigat-

ing and integrating that experience thus occupies more of the autistic child's attention and energy. This means the autistic child has less attention and energy available to focus on the subtleties of social interaction. Difficulty meeting the social expectations of non-autistics often results in social rejection, which further compounds social difficulties and impedes social development. For this reason, autism has been frequently misconstrued as being essentially a set of "social and communication deficits," by those who are unaware that the social challenges faced by autistic individuals are just by-products of the intense and chaotic nature of autistic sensory and cognitive experience.

Autism is still widely regarded as a "disorder," but this view has been challenged in recent years by proponents of the neurodiversity model, which holds that autism and other neurocognitive variants are simply part of the natural spectrum of human biodiversity, like variations in ethnicity or sexual orientation (which have also been pathologized in the past). Ultimately, to describe autism as a disorder represents a value judgment rather than a scientific fact.

**AD:** What are the potential benefits of MDMA-assisted therapy for an adult autistic population? What is the rationale for a clinical study in this area?

**NW:** Many autistics suffer from social anxiety—a fear and anxiety response around social interaction. Our hypothesis is that MDMA-assisted therapy could help to ameliorate this anxiety.

The crucial thing to understand is that social anxiety is not intrinsic to autism. Intense and atypical sensory experiences, and atypical styles of physical movement, are innate to autistic neurocognitive processing; if one is autistic, such experiences are going to be part of one's reality to some degree. But that's not necessarily the case with social anxiety.

To non-autistics, autistic people almost always come across as socially "odd" in some way—sometimes very much so. Indeed, as already noted, it's become a widespread error in the field of psychology to misconstrue autism as being primarily a set of "social and communication deficits." A more accurate and less biased way of looking at it is that the communication difficulties between autistics and non-autistics run both ways: Autistics have trouble understanding and communicating with non-autistics, and non-autistics have trouble understanding and communicating with autistics. This makes perfect sense: Of course it's challenging to understand someone whose mind works very differently from one's own. But because autistics are very much in the minority and hold less power in society, communication difficulties between an autistic and a non-autistic are always attributed to a deficit on the part of an autistic per-

son. One rarely hears it pointed out that a non-autistic person suffers from an impaired ability to understand autistics. As the political scientist Karl Deutsch said, power is "the ability not to have to learn."

The upshot of all this is that the vast majority of autistic people experience frequent social rejection and hostility, beginning in very early childhood. Most autistics today constantly receive the message—again, starting in very early childhood—that the ways they naturally think, feel, move, and communicate are all wrong; that who they are is wrong.

This constant social rejection is deeply painful and traumatic. When such experiences are the norm in a person's vulnerable formative years, of course that person is going to come to see social interaction as a venture into a minefield, a miserable and frightening experience likely to erupt without warning into yet another experience of pain, failure, and humiliation.

Unfortunately, this often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, since no one is at their best socially when they're experiencing overwhelming fear and anxiety. So the early history of social rejection causes social anxiety, which impairs social performance, resulting in further negative social experiences that reinforce the trauma.

And therein lies the key point, and the cause for hope and optimism: that the social anxiety that afflicts so many autistics isn't inherent to autism—it is, instead, a symptom of trauma. And through the marvelous work that MAPS has done with veterans suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder, it has already been well-established that MDMA-assisted

psychotherapy can be extraordinarily effective in treating the symptoms of trauma.

**AD:** I've found that when I tell non-autistic people about the work we're doing with the autistic community and MDMA, some people have a hard time understanding that we're not trying to "treat" or "cure" autism—what we're treating is social anxiety. Some of the journalists who've written about what we're doing have unfortunately misunderstood and misrepresented our work as being about "treating autism." What are your thoughts on this?

**NW:** I've seen this sort of misunderstanding occur as well. It is of vital importance for everyone connected with this work—researchers, therapists, study participants, MAPS supporters, journalists, and those who wish to cite this research in their academic work—to be clear about the distinction between treating autistic individuals for trauma-induced social anxiety, and "treating autism."

The best way to put an end to the confusion, I think, is for

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regarded as a "disorder,"  
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human biodiversity.*

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those of us who are involved in this research to make a point of stating very clearly, every time we talk or write about the work we're doing, that this is not about treating autism. I'll state it right here: we are absolutely not researching MDMA as a potential treatment for autism. We are researching the potential of MDMA, used in conjunction with therapy, to treat social anxiety in adult autistic clients. We do not endorse the view that autism itself is an illness or disorder, and we do not endorse attempts to "treat" or "cure" it. Our interest is in improving quality of life for autistic people. 🧠

**Nick Walker** is an Autistic educator, author, speaker, transdisciplinary scholar, and martial artist. He teaches in the undergraduate Psychology and Liberal Arts programs at Sofia University, and in the Interdisciplinary Studies program at California Institute of Integral Studies. He holds an M.A. in Counseling Psychotherapy and a 6th degree black belt in aikido. He is the founder and chief instructor of Aikido Shuseikai, an aikido dojo in Berkeley, California. Nick has been involved in the development of Autistic community and culture since 2003, and is a leading voice in neurodiversity activism and scholarship, and a sought-after speaker and consultant on autism. He blogs at [neurocosmopolitanism.com](http://neurocosmopolitanism.com).

**Alicia Danforth, Ph.D.** is a clinical researcher at the Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute at the Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, where she has worked on psychedelic medicine studies with principal investigator, Charles Grob, M.D., since 2004. In 2013, she graduated from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. Her dissertation research was on the MDMA (Ecstasy) experiences of adults on the autism spectrum. She is the co-investigator on the new MAPS-funded clinical trial of MDMA-assisted therapy for autistic adults who have social anxiety. Alicia met Nick Walker when they were invited to co-present at a Visionary Voices Salon in San Francisco in 2009, where he gifted her with the life-changing concept of neurodiversity. She currently is accruing postdoctoral hours toward licensure as a clinical psychologist in a private psychotherapy practice at the Los Angeles Counseling Center under the supervision of Dr. Adam Sheck. She can be reached at [adanforth@labiomed.org](mailto:adanforth@labiomed.org).

## MDMA-ASSISTED THERAPY FOR SOCIAL ANXIETY IN AUTISTIC ADULTS

### An Exploratory Pilot Study

#### MDMA-AUTISM.ORG

**Location:** Los Angeles, California

**Clinical Investigators:** Charles Grob, M.D., and Alicia Danforth, Ph.D.

**Estimated Study Cost:** \$312,000

**Raised by MAPS:** \$1,000

**Raised by Partners:** \$16,000

**Still Needed:** \$296,000

MAPS is sponsoring this collaborative study between the Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center and Stanford University.

Based on the known effects of MDMA, as well as individual reports, researchers are developing a clinical study into the safety and effectiveness of MDMA-assisted therapy for the treatment of social anxiety in 12 adults on the autism spectrum who have not previously used MDMA.

The goal of this study is to determine if MDMA-assisted therapy can safely and effectively enhance functional skills in autistic adults, an underserved group which tends to experience greater anxiety, depression, and victimization than typically developing adults.

The protocol for this study was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on July 18, 2013, and by the Institutional Review Board on October 16, 2013. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved a Schedule I license on December 27, 2013, and the Site Initiation visit was completed on February 10, 2014.

#### STUDY GOALS

- Gather evidence for the safety and effectiveness of MDMA-assisted therapy for autistic adults with social anxiety
- Determine if additional studies in this area are warranted
- Initiate a new program of research into a possible beneficial use of MDMA building on collected case accounts

#### HOW TO GET INVOLVED

If you are on the autism spectrum and would like to volunteer for our research, please e-mail study co-investigator Alicia Danforth or call (310) 222-1664 for more information.

You can also support non-profit research into MDMA-assisted therapy for social anxiety in adults on the autism spectrum by making a donation [mdma-autism.org/donate](http://mdma-autism.org/donate).



Albert Garcia-Romeu, Ph.D.

# Making your Mark in the Psychedelic Renaissance

ALBERT GARCIA-ROMEU, PH.D.

PSYCHEDELICS HAVE RECENTLY REEMERGED in mainstream culture, with novel scientific research and major media outlets making a strong case for changes in the prohibitive policies currently impeding further progress in the field of psychedelic research. Researchers at institutions worldwide (e.g., Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Yale, UCLA, NYU, Stanford, University of New Mexico, University of Zurich, Imperial College London, Hannover Medical School, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, and others) have gone against the grain of current cultural conventions to investigate drugs that have long been taboo in the academic establishment, like psilocybin, LSD, ayahuasca, *Salvia divinorum*, and MDMA. In the midst of all this, a new generation has arrived on the scene wondering how and where they can get involved with the 21st century's burgeoning psychedelic renaissance.

Some of psychedelic science's leading minds have weighed in on the matter (see [maps.org/resources/students](https://maps.org/resources/students)), including the late Andrew Sewell, M.D., whose passing is still being mourned in the community. The general consensus has been to get a solid footing in academic research, and to pursue a medical degree with psychiatric training, or a Ph.D. in chemistry, pharmacology, neuroscience, or psychology (see Dr. David Nichols' excellent piece at the above link). For those wanting to become successful researchers in the field, Katherine MacLean, Ph.D., an experimental psychologist researching psilocybin and meditation at Johns Hopkins advises, "Get as much mainstream education and training as you can, be an impeccable scientist, and don't be afraid to take risks."

Clinical psychology and psychiatry are also becoming increasingly vital to psychedelic research. As more studies get off the ground, clinicians trained to deliver psychedelic-based interventions will be needed. Ingmar Gorman, M.A., is a doctoral student in clinical psychology at the New School for Social

Research studying MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He states, "We need clinical researchers. We need researchers who are sensitive to the intricate and sometimes paradoxical nature of psychotherapy." Similarly, Brian Anderson, M.D., a Stanford-educated physician with a research background in the therapeutic use of ayahuasca, remarks, "I've been feeling a difference since 2010 when a lot of good press [about psychedelics] started coming out. In my psychiatry residency interviews I was able to have real conversations with interviewers about psychedelic therapy. Pretty much everyone was open-minded enough to consider it." But he also cautions, "there's a required subtlety to it; a friend of mine last year talked extensively about his interest in psychedelic therapy in his personal statement and didn't match into psychiatry residency."

Additionally, Thomas B. Roberts, Ph.D., suggests a multidisciplinary approach, highlighting studies in philosophy, anthropology, and the humanities as alternative ways of engaging psychedelic-related topics. For example, Danielle M. Giffort is a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago who studies how scientific credibility is created and maintained. Danielle developed an interest in psychedelics after witnessing a close friend undergo a transformative experience with LSD, and decided to use her background in sociology to tailor her dissertation research to explore psychedelic science as a case study in scientific legitimacy. She recommends "connecting an interest in psychedelics with broader conversations happening in your field of study."

For now, there are still relatively few labs conducting government-approved scientific research with psychedelics. If you wanted to get involved, you would have to be near one of these institutions, and have some relevant education. As a research assistant you could start with a Bachelor's degree, and in some labs you can work as an intern as an undergraduate. Most of this work involves data management, paperwork, and administrative

tasks. With some graduate education you could become a research scientist (Master's or Ph.D.) or postdoctoral fellow (Ph.D. or M.D.) who assists in conducting studies, analyzing data, and writing manuscripts. A final step above this would be starting your own line of research with psychedelics as a Principal Investigator, for which you'll have to be well-established with an M.D. or Ph.D., be at an institution that will approve your work, and have ample publications and expertise in an area related to the research. As you can see, this is not a summer project and requires many years of schooling and hard work regardless of your field of expertise.

Of course, not everyone is so keen on higher education. This does have some logic to it, since even if you were to get a Ph.D. or an M.D., there are no guarantees you would be able to work specifically with psychedelics. Funding and institutional support to conduct such research is scarce for now, with the majority of financial support coming from private non-profit organizations such as Heffter Research Institute, the Beckley Foundation, the Council on Spiritual Practices, and MAPS. As the work progresses we are hopeful the tide will turn to make the research easier to conduct. For now, there are still a number of ways to get involved that don't necessarily require an advanced degree.

Many organizations do psychedelic-related work outside a laboratory setting. Harm reduction is a particularly important area where groups like the Zendo Project and DanceSafe offer invaluable services to promote safety within the psychedelic community. The Zendo Project provides onsite compassionate care for individuals having challenging psychedelic experiences at festivals such as Burning Man and Boom. DanceSafe

provides drug education at raves, nightclubs, and other dance events, including onsite adulterant testing, and currently has more than 10 local chapters across North America. Besides the festival and club scene, groups like MAPS and others ([maps.org/resources/links](http://maps.org/resources/links)) provide excellent outlets for contributing to the cause.

I would like to offer these basic principles as pointers that may be applied no matter what path you take:

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*Keeping up-to-date with current findings can make you a powerful voice of reason in the debate around the relative harms and merits of psychedelics.*

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**Educate yourself.** If this is an active area of interest for you, stay in the know. Thanks to the Internet this is easier than ever before (e.g., Google Scholar can be set to automatically notify you of new publications on any subject). Keeping up-to-date with current findings can make you a powerful voice of reason in the debate around the

relative harms and merits of psychedelics. For instance, a recent large-scale study found that psychedelic use predicted decreased rates of repeat incarceration for drug-related offenders on parole (Hendricks, *et al.*, 2014). Another found in a random sample of American adults that psychedelic use was associated with lower rates of mental illness (Krebs & Johansen, 2013). Rather than being simply pro-psychedelic, it helps to have a handle on the facts.

**Understand the opposition.** Many of your friends may think psychedelics are great, but it's important to realize a large portion of the population believe these drugs to be universally harmful. This is often attributable to misinformation and/or misunderstanding, but it's absolutely true that in some cases psychedelic use has led to harm and even death, so it's important





*Some members of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine psilocybin research team. From left to right: Matthew W. Johnson, Ph.D., Associate Professor; Albert Garcia-Romeu, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Fellow; Mary P. Cosimano, M.S.W., Guide and Senior Research Program Coordinator; Margaret A. Klinedinst, B.S., Senior Research Program Supervisor; and Roland R. Griffiths, Ph.D., Professor. Photo credit: August F. Holtyn, Ph.D.*

not to dismiss people outright if they aren't 100% in support of psychedelics. As much as you can, try to engage in a meaningful dialogue, and keep an open mind. As representatives of an unconventional perspective, it helps to be diplomatic. In the same vein, it's key to know your audience. If you find yourself in a situation where you'll be speaking about psychedelics, feel out who is present. You don't want to step into a room full of law enforcement and start talking about how horrible the police are, and you generally don't want to show up at a scientific conference and start talking about "tripping." Furthermore, those with previous personal experience with psychedelics may choose to refrain from discussing it, as it can detract from the credibility of their professional work with psychedelics, potentially creating barriers to employment and funding. Thus, it helps to be aware of people's leanings, to appeal to their sympathies, and to speak in a language they can understand and hopefully get behind. This can make your message more palatable, and keep people from going on the defensive before they get the chance to consider your perspective.

**Reach out.** Finding allies is imperative. This can consist of networking at conferences, workshops, and other events (which is partly how I got my job), as well as emailing or otherwise introducing yourself to people who work in areas of mutual interest. Once your name is out there, you have a much better chance of getting your foot in the door. Also valuable is finding a mentor who can show you the ropes in a given area. During my graduate education, teachers like Jim Fadiman, Ph.D., and Charles T. Tart, Ph.D., were instrumental in my development, and now as a postdoctoral fellow, working with Matthew W. Johnson, Ph.D., and Roland R. Griffiths, Ph.D., has greatly contributed to my skills as a critical thinker, scientist, and writer.

**Be creative, and persistent.** There's more than one way to get where you're going. If you are passionate about a particular subject, there is almost certainly a way to make that part of your life. It might not be obvious, and may take a good bit of trial and error, but ultimately creativity and persistence are key. Amber Lyon, an Emmy-award winning writer, filmmaker, and

journalist states, “I’m not a doctor or scientist, but am offering my skills as a journalist to spread accurate information about the medicines. Psychedelics are some of the most profoundly effective substances for healing the mind and body, yet the majority of news coverage centers on arrests for drug possession and the rare festival death. To help solve this problem I have created **Reset.Me**, a news website devoted to independent, accurate coverage of psychedelic medicines.”

**Find your niche.** In academia you are usually expected to become an expert in a relatively narrow field of inquiry, and it can also help to be specific about your interests in non-academic settings. For example, in science it’s not very useful to say you have an interest in a broad area like psychedelics. It’s much better to focus on a particular topic, like psilocybin in the treatment of smoking addiction. It’s very hard to work in abstract generalities, but a focused problem or issue is much more amenable to proper investigation.

**Cultivate other interests.** There are few (if any) people who make their living exclusively by working with psychedelics. Even top-notch researchers spend much of their time working in other areas. For instance, Matthew W. Johnson, Ph.D., Associate Professor at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine says, “I have expertise in psychological processes of addiction, self-control, and the abuse liability assessment of novel drugs. Those areas dovetail very nicely with my work in psychedelics, particularly my focus on using psilocybin to treat addiction. But my non-psychedelic research in these domains is what allows me to obtain grants as Principal Investigator and maintain my academic position.”

**Organize.** A “think globally, act locally” mentality can be critical in bringing the insights of psychedelic culture to the population at large. Hence, if there is no real psychedelic hub in your immediate geographic area, it may be up to you to create a forum for like-minded individuals. Bookstores, universities, nightclubs, and coffee shops all provide potential havens where groups can meet to discuss ideas, and possibly begin initiatives to take action in ways that fit unique local needs. In this way, building community can help to make a positive impact. Nese Devenot, a doctoral candidate studying psychedelic philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania, recently organized Psychedemia, a multidisciplinary conference devoted to psychedelics. She notes that the conference “received absolutely zero resistance or pushback from any quarter. The fact that an Ivy League medical school was willing to sponsor an academic conference in which scientists, artists, philosophers, students, and activists shared common ground is sign enough that these are legitimate topics to explore in academia today.”

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**Be a psychedelic citizen.** The crux of the matter concerning psychedelics may not be the drugs themselves, but the realizations these drugs can help facilitate and the way that we ultimately bring those realizations into the world through our very being and our interaction with others. Thus, the psychedelic movement is not about intoxication, but about embodying the values inherent in the psychedelic experience as one of the ultimate ends of “psychedelia.” Principles such as peace, unity, equality, compassion, and harmonious co-existence can be practiced by everyone regardless of career or education.

Albert Hofmann, Ph.D., the venerable Swiss chemist who first synthesized LSD, wrote:

*I share the belief of many of my contemporaries that the spiritual crisis pervading all spheres of Western industrial society can be remedied only by a change in our worldview. We shall have to shift from the materialistic, dualistic belief that people and their environment are separate, toward a new consciousness of an all-encompassing reality, which embraces the experiencing ego, a reality in which people feel their oneness with animate nature and all of creation.*

If you stand with Hofmann and others who believe in the importance and increasing urgency of such a change, then now’s the time to go out and make your mark. 🌐

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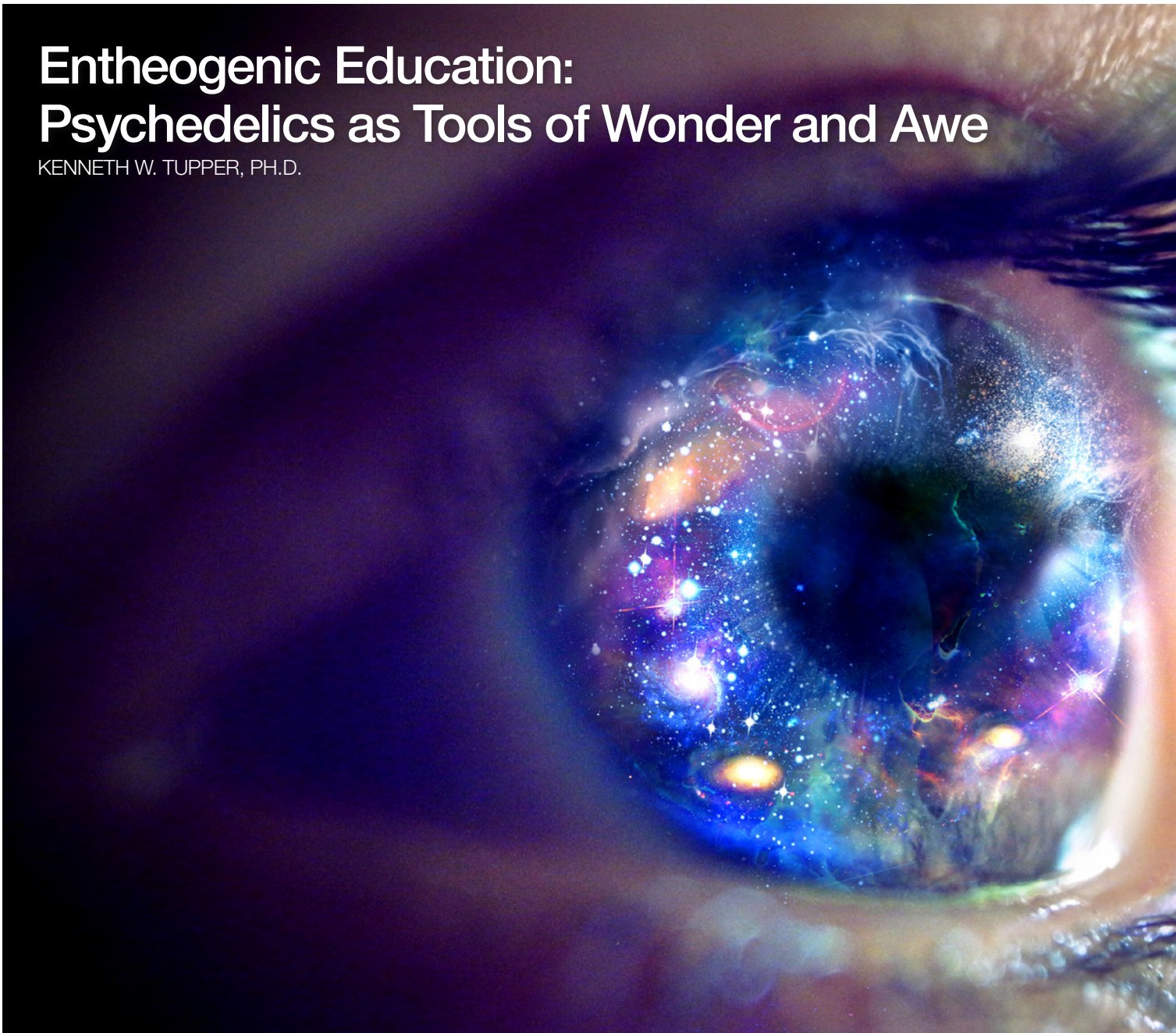
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# Entheogenic Education: Psychedelics as Tools of Wonder and Awe

KENNETH W. TUPPER, PH.D.



*“IS IT TOO MUCH TO HOPE that a system of education may some day be devised, which shall give results, in terms of human development, commensurate with the time, money, energy and devotion expended? In such a system of education it may be that mescaline or some other chemical substance may play a part by making it possible for young people to “taste and see” what they have learned about at second hand...in the writings of the religious, or the works of poets, painters and musicians.”*

—Aldous Huxley (Horowitz & Palmer, 1999)

British novelist and philosopher Aldous Huxley’s suggestion that a psychedelic substance such as mescaline may produce valuable learning experiences is a nicely articulated example of

the concept of entheogenic education. Before Huxley’s expression of it, this idea was most clearly evident in the metaphor of “plant teachers” found in traditional indigenous knowledge and cultural practices involving psychoactive plants or preparations. Later, in some 1950s and 1960s psychedelic research, cognitive enhancement with substances such as LSD, mescaline and psilocybin was considered a promising avenue of inquiry. However, the educational potential of psychedelic or entheogenic substance use remains an area of study that has yet to be adequately explored.

Today, while the renaissance of psychedelic studies in the 21st century is largely focused on the assorted medical or therapeutic possibilities for these plants and substances, it behooves us not to overlook the broader non-medical potential they may





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have for learning and cognition. In what follows, I briefly summarize some of the historical and cross-cultural foundations of entheogenic education and explore how psychedelic substances—used in careful ways and supportive contexts—might fill a gap in the learning outcomes and psychosocial effects of modern school-based education, in particular fostering the emotions of wonder and awe and their relationship to creativity, life meaning, and purpose.

## THE ORIGINS OF ENTHEOGENIC EDUCATION

The notion that some psychoactive plants can help humans learn important things about the cosmos and their place in it is a belief held by many different cultures. At the roots of modern



Kenneth W. Tupper, Ph.D.

Western culture, for example, the Indo-Aryan Vedic scriptures make abundant reference to the spiritual or mystical importance of a plant or fungus known as *soma*. Referred to in both cosmic and biological metaphorical terms, partaking of *soma* was venerated as the highest form of spiritual understanding one could achieve, a prime example of entheogenic learning (Wasson, 1968). Likewise, the ancient Greek mystery religion of Eleusis culminated in the ritual consumption of *kykeon*, surmised to be some kind of psychoactive preparation that could reliably induce mystical states of consciousness and a kind of learning that was celebrated among all classes of Athenian society (Wasson, Hofmann, & Ruck, 1978). Even within the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Semitic origin myth recounted in the book of Genesis allegorically suggests an instance of entheogenic learn-

ing, whereby eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge inspired human self-consciousness and divine awakenings.

In the Americas, there have been more enduring examples of entheogenic educational practices, some of which managed to survive into the modern era despite repression by Euroamerican colonial religious and government authorities. For example, the traditional Mazatec uses of psilocybin mushrooms were continued by people like *curandera* Maria Sabina, who said of early encounters with her “little children” (a phrase she used to refer to the mushrooms): “I felt that they spoke to me. After eating them I heard voices. Voices that came from another world. It was like the voice of a father who gives advice... Sometime later I knew that the mushrooms were like God. That they gave wisdom” (Estrada, 1981, pp. 39–40). Similar educational value has been accorded to the peyote cactus, as a Mexican indigenous Huichol person relates: “Peyote is for learning; those with strong hearts will receive messages from the gods” (Shaefer, 1996, p. 165).

Among Amazonian indigenous and mestizo peoples, the visionary entheogenic brew ayahuasca has long been esteemed as a plant teacher (Luna, 1984), a categorical testimony to the educational value of its psychoactive effects. Mestre Irineu, the spiritual founder of the Brazilian ayahuasca religion Santo Daime, in his early formative experiences reportedly “learned that the *daime* [i.e., ayahuasca], besides being a visionary drink, also had special healing powers and that it contained *um professor*, a teacher, capable of revealing secrets about the spiritual world” (Schmidt, 2007, p. 52). From a more academic perspective, cognitive psychologist Benny Shanon notably proffers a “schooling” metaphor for the sustained practice of ayahuasca drinking, and reports that he has heard the same characterization of a sense of systematized learning from other experienced ayahuasca drinkers (Shanon, 2002, pp. 301–3).

Claims of mind expansion, cognitive enhancement, and creative insights among modern psychedelic researchers and enthusiasts further support the concept of entheogenic education. Perhaps most famously, Timothy Leary (1968) advocated the benefits of LSD and other psychedelics for mind-expansion and the democratization of mystical experience. However, cognitive, creative, and spiritual development were significant themes in the academic work of many early psychedelic researchers and aficionados in the 1950s and 1960s (Walsh & Grob, 2005). More recently, others—including scientists, artists, musicians and business leaders—have likewise attributed some of their most important intellectual and creative insights to their uses of entheogens or psychedelics (Mullis, 1998; Isaacson, 2011; Markoff, 2005).

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More explicitly in the field of education, teacher and education researcher Ignacio Götz argued in his 1972 book *The Psychedelic Teacher* that students would be better served by teachers who adopt a personal approach to knowing and learning that embraces mystical or “psychedelic” states of consciousness.

Emeritus professor of education Thomas Roberts (2006) has argued that conventional cognitive science and education largely fail to recognize that the human “mindbody” (his term for states of consciousness) is capable of a diversity of valences, and that entheogens are an important means producing non-ordinary states of consciousness, by which creative, intellectual, or spiritual development may be stimulated. The ritual use of

psychoactive substances for learning and developmental purposes was explored in an earlier special edition of the MAPS *Bulletin* (2004), titled “Rites of Passage: Kids and Psychedelics.”

## THE ACADEMIC PSYCHEDELIC RENAISSANCE

The renaissance of academic interest in psychedelics in the early 21st century has already generated intriguing new empirical evidence about these substances and their potential benefits for learning and psychosocial flourishing. For example, researchers at Johns Hopkins University have corroborated earlier scientific findings that psilocybin administered in a clinical setting can produce mystical-type experiences that have substantial and sustained personal meaning and spiritual significance (Griffiths, *et al.*, 2008). They also found that the psilocybin-induced mystical experience produced a greater degree of openness in adults, which can in turn correlate with changes in behaviors, attitudes, and values, an unusual psychological phenomenon to see in older people. Similarly, research on healthy people who drink ayahuasca in ritual contexts suggests that spiritual insights, changed worldviews, and a new more positive orientation towards life are not uncommon outcomes (Bouso, *et al.*, 2012; Grob, *et al.*, 1996; Halpern, *et al.*, 2008). These phenomena help account for not only the medicinal or healing properties of psychedelics, but also their possible spiritual, cognitive enhancement, or educational value.

To explain how and why entheogenic or psychedelic experiences can be educational ones, and to advance a program of further research in this area, the development of a coherent theoretical framework for entheogenic education is required. My own scholarly effort in this area has been to adapt ideas from contemporary educational and psychological theorists whose work, while not explicitly about psychedelics, can help support an explanatory account of entheogenic education. For example, Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences

criticized conventional ideas about intelligence, which focus largely on mathematical and linguistic kinds, and alternatively proposed a variety of others (1983), later including what he described as “existential intelligence” (1999). While Gardner has himself expressed ambivalence about existential intelligence, I have argued that conceiving of psychedelic plants or substances as cognitive tools helps both to strengthen the case for its validity and to illuminate the potential educational benefits of entheogenic substance use (2002). I have also drawn on the education theories of Kieran Egan (1997), and philosophical ideas of Richard Shusterman (2008), to argue that the circumspect use of entheogens can be understood as the deployment of cognitive tools to catalyze what Egan describes as primordial types of understanding, the (pre-linguistic) somatic and the (pre-literate) mythic (Tupper, 2003). In my Ph.D. dissertation in Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia, the final chapter further developed some of the conceptual foundations for understanding the education potential of entheogens such as ayahuasca (2011).

## WONDER AND AWE IN ENTHEOGENIC EDUCATION

The potential value of entheogens in the domain of education can be further elucidated by considering how experiences of wonder and awe—phenomenological markers of both mysti-

cal and psychedelic experiences—are neglected in the cultural institution of modern schooling. Although historically underappreciated in psychological research, the emotions of wonder and awe may be crucial components of moral, spiritual, and aesthetic domains of human cognition (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). For example, Robert Fuller (2006, p. 157) asserts that wonder:

*is characterized by its rare ability to elicit prolonged engagement with life. Experiences of wonder succeed in motivating creative and constructive approaches to life by imbuing the surrounding world with an alluring luster. Experiences of wonder enable us to view the world independent of its relationships to our immediate needs.*

In his earlier work on imagination and education, Egan (1992) argues that experiences of wonder and awe are essential to stimulating imagination and cultivating a meaningful life, that one’s creativity, educational development, and self-actualization are impoverished without them. Environmental educator David Orr (1994, p. 23) concurs, suggesting that “[a]s our sense of wonder in nature diminishes, so too does our sense of the sacred, our pleasure in the created world, and the impulse behind a great deal of our best thinking.” And psychologist Martin Seligman (2011) suggests that late modern materialist consumerism may be linked to a growing lack of existential meaning and psychological flourishing among American youth.

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Deriving meaning, purpose, and satisfaction from life must be considered among the highest goals of human existence, and as Keichi Takaya (2014, p. 99) argues, “keeping the ability to feel wonder itself ought to be an important part of the purpose of education.” However, contemporary school-based education—and the broader socio-economic environment in which it is situated—does very little explicitly to foster such outcomes. As an institution rooted in the 19th century political and military ambitions of nation states (Ramirez & Boli, 1987), the modern school today remains heavily invested in structures, processes and programs that tend to sustain a long-standing antipathy to wonder and awe in modern Western culture (Egan, 1997; Daston & Park, 1998). This, in part, may be what Aldous Huxley was referring to in the introductory quotation lamenting what schools deliver in terms of existential meaning (Horowitz & Palmer, 1999), and what inspired him to explore the idea of entheogenic education—through a description of the use of a psychoactive mushroom used in rites of passage into adulthood in the fictional society of Pala—in his final novel, *Island* (1962).

The educational value of entheogens and psychedelics may be their capacity—when used respectfully and circumspectly—to reliably evoke experiences of wonder and awe, to stimulate transcendental or mystical experiences, and to catalyze a sense of life meaning or purpose. The careful and elaborate ritual traditions of various indigenous entheogenic practices with plant teachers have long betokened how entheogenic education can be realized in practice. Most notably, such traditions typically emphasize the importance of context and intention, with stringent protocols for who may participate, what kind and how much of a psychedelic substance they take, and under what circumstances the experience occurs. Deploying these kinds of powerful cognitive tools for educational purposes in the 21st century will require equivalent care and attention to implementing these kinds of proto-harm reduction conventions. Exploring and extending the possibilities of entheogenic education may be an important way for humans to adapt, flourish, and psychologically thrive even as we face unprecedented challenges—such as ecological limits to growth—in the not-too-distant future. 🌀

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**Psychedelic Science 2013** videos are available online! Visit [maps.org/videos](http://maps.org/videos).

At Psychedelic Science 2013, over 100 of the world's leading researchers and more than 1,900 international attendees gathered to share recent findings on the benefits and risks of LSD, psilocybin, MDMA, ayahuasca, ibogaine, 2C-B, ketamine, marijuana, and more, over three days of conference presentations, and two days of pre- and post-conference workshops.



Chelsea Rose

# Just Being: My Experience of the Simple Efficacy of Psychedelic Harm Reduction

CHELSEA ROSE

AS A THERAPIST IN TRAINING, participating in the Zendo Project's psychedelic harm reduction has brought me incredible learning opportunities, connections for resource collaboration, and a purpose to serve others. By helping people through difficult psychedelic experiences at events and gatherings, I witnessed those who were struggling gain valuable insight. Additionally, this prevented unnecessary and potentially traumatic situations from escalating.

Participating in two Zendo Project harm reduction trainings provided me with the basic foundational understanding that we can create a container for someone going through a psychedelic crisis by attuning to our innate gifts and simply holding space. We needn't "do something" other than be a presence that allows another to discover more of who they are, in a safe, compassionate, and loving way. Through my experience at the Zendo, I have strengthened my therapeutic skills and my understanding of non-directive interventions that allow healing to take place in its own intrinsic way.

The topic of psychedelic harm reduction reaches beyond just those who want to offer their time in the Zendo, as many festival-goers find personal meaning in the material. When attending Zendo Project trainings at Burning Man 2013 and Envision 2014, I noticed that several people had trickled into the trainings who weren't Zendo volunteers. By the end of the training at Envision, a good-sized crowd had accumulated to hear the information presented, including an audience of people hanging out in the nearby rope-and-net jungle gym in the trees. When Zendo Project coordinator Linnae Ponté and co-coordinator Sara Girón finished their presentation, an enthusiastic response

echoed from the trees. It became clear to me that these trainings could benefit not only those working in harm reduction, but the culture at large.

Festival culture, in its myriad forms, extends far beyond the events themselves and has become an everyday lifestyle, where exploration and transformation are keys to happiness and well-being. Although not always, for some people this search for inner evolution includes the use of psychedelics to catalyze these growth processes. As a result, many people have experienced themselves, or a close friend, going through difficult and sometimes scary "trips," which happen fairly often due to the lack of supportive contexts or adequate education.

The training empowers volunteers and attendees to use their inherent gifts of presence and of being, without needing to "fix" a particular problem. Seeing someone going through pain, fear, and hardship can evoke in us the desire to do something to end their suffering. The training teaches that these challenges are part of the human experience, and that transformation can come from going through such experiences while being supported in a sensitive and considerate way. Actively being present involves techniques such as attunement, validation, mirroring, and breathing. It can

also be useful to provide gentle reassurance or reframing of the experience. These methods of support reflect what is already happening for the individual, while also reassuring them that their experience is acceptable and that we can allow it to unfold.

If someone you're with is having a difficult psychedelic experience and they want to jump around, jump around with them. If they are feeling sad, reflect that emotion on your own face. If they are scared, validate that what is happening could feel



[zendoproject.org](http://zendoproject.org)



really scary. It's basic. It's simple. And it has incredible effects. In doing this over the course of a troublesome experience, resistance decreases, acceptance finds its way in, and we can emerge with valuable insights.

In the Zendo, experiences come in many forms but everyone is welcome, free of judgment and blame. At Burning Man 2013, my fiancé Aleh and I worked as a team, sitting with a young man who wanted to hide his head beneath a blanket and hold our hands. At the time I didn't feel like I was doing much, but later on the guest told me that was exactly what he needed to feel connected to reality. Another girl brought herself into the Zendo, sharing that she had taken a combination of substances including alcohol, LSD, and ketamine, and had lost her friends. She wasn't having a particularly difficult time, but wanted to be somewhere she felt safe until she became more sober. We listened to and acknowledged her perspective, and we spent several minutes curled over in laughter. The next day she came back to offer her appreciation and gratitude, enthusiastically exclaiming the Zendo was her favorite place on the playa.

At Envision 2014, a volunteer, Mason, and I sat with a man who had taken LSD and was feeling overwhelmed by the festival energy. He spent the whole day in the Zendo, feeling relieved to be in a place where he could rest and feel safe. That evening, Mason helped the guest move his tent next to the Zendo, because for him, it felt like the safest place at the event. At the end of the weekend, he gave me a giant hug, sharing his gratitude for the help we had offered and his hope to keep in touch with the project. It isn't uncommon for guests to become volunteers at later events.

We have an incredible team of volunteers from several walks of life, full of talent and creativity. Our Envision training started out with two of our playful volunteers, Johannah and Addie, hula-hooping to electronic music onstage. Their interactive way of dancing together was nothing short of magical and demonstrated the spirit that our volunteers bring to the Zendo Project. As a shift lead, I have had the opportunity to oversee volunteers while they spent time with guests. It was inspiring to watch all the unique ways that volunteers provided support. It was intellectually nourishing to share our ideas, thoughts, and natural brilliance with one another. At Envision, our shift leads included Lucas, an eight-year military war veteran who now owns a medical marijuana dispensary in Washington; Dominique, who has many years of experience working in harm reduction at Shambhala Festival in Canada; Danuta, a Polish woman whose diverse cultural exposure has inspired a passion

for understanding human nature; and Bette, an art therapist and ibogaine therapist living in Costa Rica, where she combines the ancient knowledge of the Mosoko Bwiti tradition

with the Western model of ibogaine treatment. We also had the opportunity to triage with the medical staff, lead by Richard Gottlieb.

When we help one person at the Zendo, it makes being there worth every bit of effort. It is wonderful to discover how simple and rewarding this work can be. Every time a guest comes in feeling frazzled, overwhelmed, and disoriented, then leaves feeling peaceful and rejuvenated, I'm reminded

how necessary harm reduction spaces are at transformational events and gatherings.

Linnae ended the training at Envision by sharing a quote from inspirational poet Maya Angelou: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." By sitting with a guest and just being present and being ourselves, we allow them that same opportunity to be themselves. When we have space to be ourselves fully, we feel fabulously relieved, empowered, and satisfied. This is the growth and change we are inspired to support through the Zendo Project.

Download the Zendo Project Psychedelic Harm Reduction Training Manual and learn more at [zendoproject.org](http://zendoproject.org).

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*Zendo at Envision 2014*

## THE ZENDO PROJECT MISSION STATEMENT

*It is our mission to:*

- Provide a supportive space for individuals undergoing difficult psychedelic experiences or other psychological emergencies in order to help turn those experiences into opportunities for learning and personal growth, and to reduce the number of drug-related psychiatric hospitalizations.
- Create an environment where volunteers can work alongside one another to improve their harm reduction skills and receive training and feedback.
- Demonstrate that safe, productive psychedelic experiences are possible without the need for law enforcement-based policies.

[zendoproject.org](http://zendoproject.org)



# Collaborative Harm Reduction and Psychedelic Education at Burning Man

ANNA SZOSTEK



*Photo credit: Geneva Photography*

AT THE 2013 BURNING MAN event in Nevada, I had the opportunity to volunteer with both the MAPS Zendo Project and the Full Circle Tea House, two psychedelic harm reduction spaces that offer medical professionals and volunteers training in assisting individuals in altered states of consciousness, and that educate visitors in drug safety and self-care practices.

Similar to the peer-to-peer education movement within gay communities to promote safer sex during the HIV epidemic (Shepherd & Turner, 1999), the Tea House and the Zendo Project both use peer education to train volunteers in best harm reduction practices for their community, thus educating the whole community and reducing the number of people taken into hospital care or custody after consuming psychedelics.

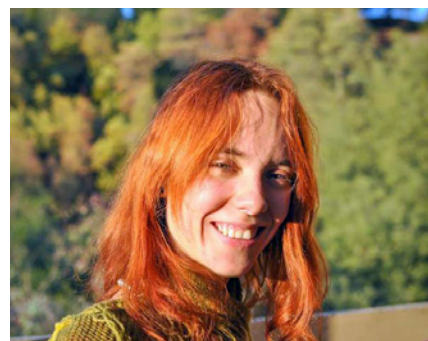
Through this work, the psychedelic community has the opportunity to teach the general public that we are responsible and capable of caring for each other. This allows space for a new dialogue focused on increasing the benefits of psychedelics while simultaneously reducing their risks.

The Zendo Project ([zendoproject.org](http://zendoproject.org)) creates a safe space for processing difficult psychedelic experiences with the assistance of trained sitters. Guests learn that even challenging

experiences can be beneficial, and are educated in post-trip integration, essential for maximizing the benefits of any experience.

In 2013, 140 individuals, including medical professionals, therapists, student therapists, and volunteers, attended the four-hour training session, learning to hold space and monitor the health and safety of guests while simultaneously caring for themselves. Volunteers gained real-world experience working with people on psychedelics, and were encouraged to share best practices gained from their sitting sessions with other volunteers.

The Zendo Project also acts as a hub for drug information by passing out cards from the harm reduction organization DanceSafe ([dancesafe.org](http://dancesafe.org)), which list drug effects, dosages, addiction potential, and safety tips for popular recreational drugs (including alcohol and tobacco). Missi Wooldridge, Executive Director of DanceSafe, says that these cards will soon be updated to include information on new research chemicals, including the synthetic cathinones (often sold as MDMA or “bath salts”), MXE (often sold as ketamine) and 25I-NBOMe (often sold as LSD).



Anna Szostek

In the coming years, the Zendo Project will work alongside DanceSafe to add drug testing services, chemically identifying substances brought in by guests and providing advice and counseling on their use. This, in combination with the updated educational cards, will help to reduce the number of guests who struggle after taking misidentified research chemicals.

Drug testing has already been effective at the Boom Festival in Portugal, allowing guests to learn about the effects, potential risks, and dangerous combinations of substances before consuming them. Initial research from the Netherlands and Switzerland suggests that implementing drug testing services may contribute to a slight decline in drug use overall, and a significant decline in multi-drug use and drug overuse (Bücheli, *et al.*, 2012).

The Full Circle Tea House ([fullcircleteahouse.com](http://fullcircleteahouse.com)) was founded in 2011 by Annie Oak, former Burning Man Ranger and founder of the Women's Visionary Congress, a 501c3 non-profit devoted to promoting diverse traditions of consciousness inquiry ([visionarycongress.org](http://visionarycongress.org)). It's the perfect space to rest and feel connected, offering calming and hydrating herbal and caffeinated teas in the Chinese Gong Fu ceremonial style, plenty

of shade, mountains of pillows and blankets, and zero electronic music. The Palenque Norte lecture series ([palenquenorte.com](http://palenquenorte.com)) hosts educational lectures on psychedelic research, spirituality, and community activism in a revival tent next door.

The space is not specifically a psychedelic care facility, though it does offer one-on-one support for guests and is always located near a medical unit. While the Zendo Project and Black Rock Ranger models gather demographic data on guests and are obligated to report cases of domestic violence to the police, the Tea House gathers no data on guests unless necessary for emergency medical care. Organizers of the Tea House believe this is a responsible approach when working in communities of drug users, whose privacy is often violated. It also allows for the support and education of individuals who are not comfortable sharing their information.

Annie Oak estimates that several thousand guests were served over two weeks of continuous tea service at Burning Man 2013, and many more during other events that year. Few Tea House guests have required the intense one-on-one care provided by the Zendo Project; rather, the Tea House acts as a pre-crisis risk reduction space, caring for guests before they



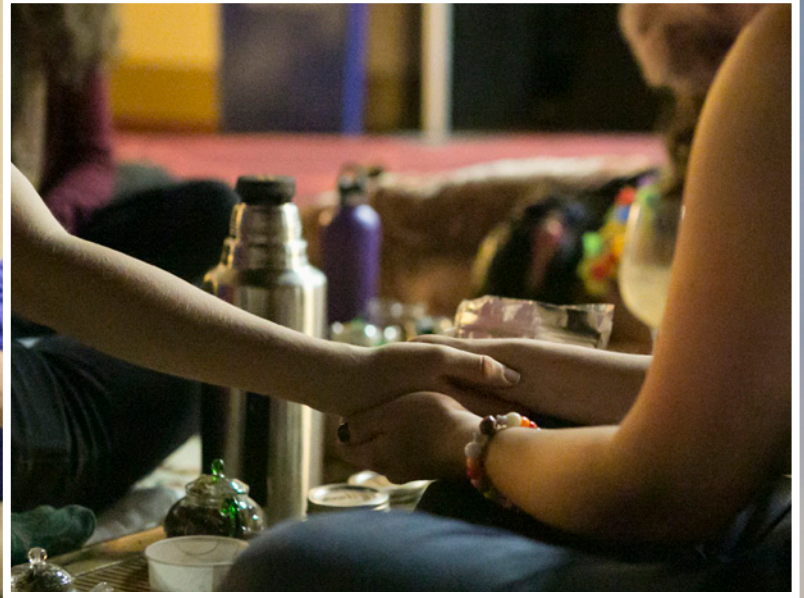


Photo credits (above, above right): Geneva Photography

need intense care. “After 16 years on the playa, we’ve learned that harm reduction often comes down to hydration, rest, the avoidance of alcohol, and quiet, supportive conversations that take place in community spaces,” explains Annie.

Tea House volunteers are trained both in Gong Fu tea service and in psychedelic care services in group settings. Servers keep an eye on guests in the space, especially those who are sleeping, and are trained to respond in case of emergency. Volunteer medical professionals are included in shifts whenever possible.

Annie estimates that the Tea House trained 300 tea servers in 2013, and that over 900 servers have been trained in the last three years at Burning Man and other events. She is also working to establish a crew of Shura Rangers (named in honor of Sasha Shulgin) who will be trained in psychedelic care, as well as CPR, tea service, and peer counseling, and who will offer additional support at festivals and events.

The Zendo Project and the Tea House were located on opposite ends of the playa in 2013, connected by radio and the Rainbow Bridge Art Car (donated to MAPS by David Bronner of Dr. Bronner’s Soaps) shuttling guests between the spaces

while providing mobile tea service. The Rainbow Bridge allowed guests who had completed intensive time in the Zendo to travel to the Tea House for alcohol-free integration, rest, and rehydration. Similarly, any guest who came to the Tea House requiring one-on-one care was transported to the Zendo.

Tea House and Zendo Project volunteers will be offered joint psychedelic care and CPR training by a licensed trainer prior to Burning Man 2014. Both groups hope to increase the number of emergency medical technicians (EMTs) capable of dealing with overdose and other situations involving psychedelics. Annie Oak stresses the importance of having volunteers with medical training who can address breathing problems and other medical issues in harm reduction facilities and rest spaces. The goal is to ensure that there are volunteers capable of triage and handling medical emergencies available during every shift in both spaces.

At Burning Man 2014, the two spaces will once again be positioned on opposite ends of the playa. The Tea House will also establish a space for the care of individuals who require more privacy, and the Zendo Project may be joined by a small adjacent Tea House.





(From left) Annie Oak serves tea; attendees share company and tea service at Psychedelic Science 2013; the Rainbow Bridge art car; Anna Szostek and Linnae Ponté at Burning Man 2013.

The Tea House and the Zendo Project plan to test their first combined space at another smaller festival in 2014. The combined model will feature a Tea House in front that invites guests to hydrate and rest, and a secluded Zendo Project space next door for guests who need quiet rest or support from trained sitters.

In combination with drug testing organizations like DanceSafe, these sister spaces are training teams of psychedelic therapists and tea servers capable of crowd management and emergency medical care, while providing guests with education in the appropriate, safe, and effective use of psychedelic substances.

Peer education and compassionate support allow the psychedelic community to teach the public that we are capable of taking care of ourselves, and that psychedelics can be safe and beneficial in the right contexts.

The Tea House organizers are currently raising funds to build a new facility with built-in washing facilities for tea cups. To learn more and support the project or volunteer as a tea server, please contact the Tea House Logistics Mistress at [ah@well.com](mailto:ah@well.com).

Due to increased interest, the Zendo Project will only

be accepting medical professionals, therapists, and therapists in training as volunteers this year. To get involved or learn more, contact Linnae Ponté at [linnae@maps.org](mailto:linnae@maps.org).

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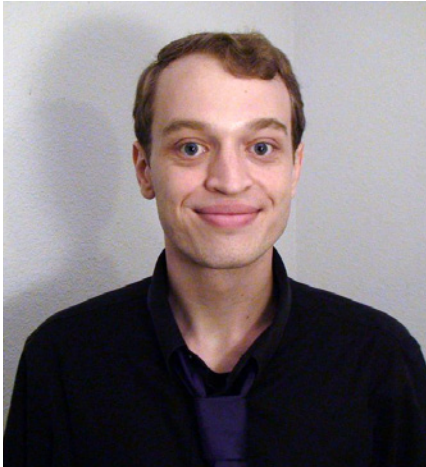
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# Psychedelic Education and Social Media

BRYCE MONTGOMERY



*Bryce Montgomery*

THE LATE COMEDIAN **BILL HICKS** once said, “Wouldn’t you like to see a positive LSD story on the news? To base your decision on information rather than scare tactics and superstition?” Today, media coverage of psychedelics has become increasingly positive, focusing more on scientific information than on propaganda. With the help of the internet and social networks like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, accurate information about the risks and benefits of psychedelics and marijuana has never been more prominent than now.

In the 1990s, Drug Abuse Resistance Education, widely known as DARE, was the primary source of public drug education. Police officers visited elementary schools to lecture children about the purported dangers of drugs, instilling fear in the developing generation. The DARE generation was supposed to grow up in complete fear of drugs. Red ribbons were handed out as a way to signify a “drug-free” life. I remember those ribbons being quickly tossed to the ground, and left hanging on lockers or forgotten on backpacks until a single thread remained.

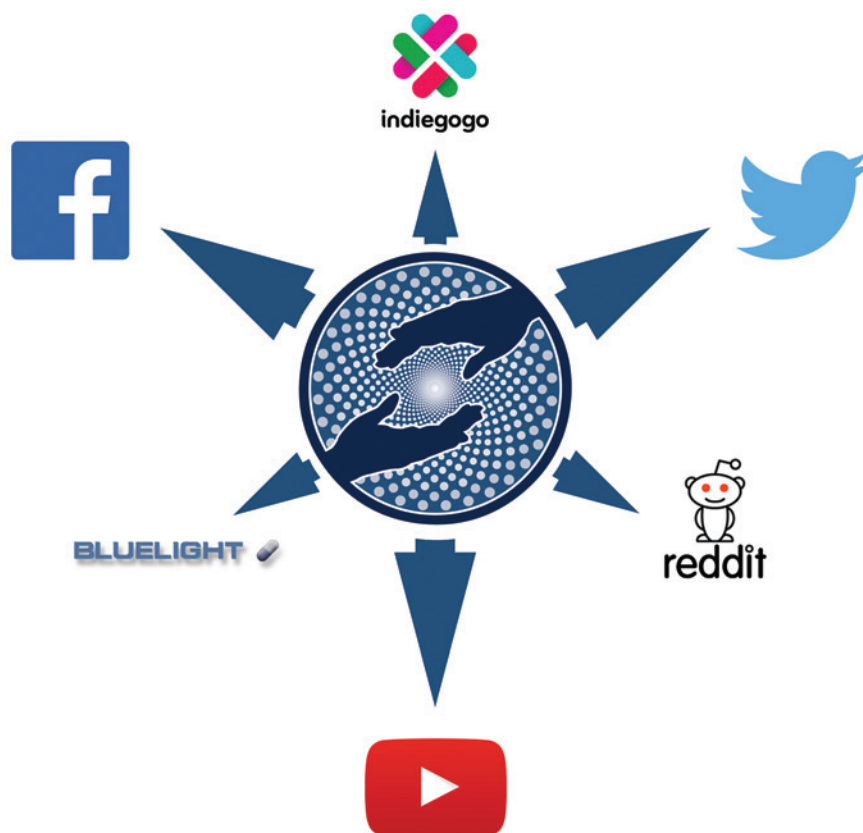
Erowid (**erowid.org**) was established in 1995 to provide free, public information about drugs. The Erowid drug database has proven to be an effective entry point for people to reeducate themselves about the risks and benefits of drugs. When Erowid began accepting and publishing written accounts of first-hand experiences with psychedelics and other drugs, a new outlet appeared for people to share their stories and learn from others. Experience reports allowed people to see that they were not

alone in feeling or thinking a certain way during psychedelic experiences.

The **maps.org** domain name was purchased on July 24, 1994, making MAPS one of the very first non-profit organizations on the World Wide Web. MAPS started to utilize emerging social web sites starting with YouTube in March 2007, followed by Facebook and Twitter in 2009. We use these tools to share research updates, news from major media outlets, articles from smaller sites and blogs, upcoming events around the world; and also to provide a place for people to share their views on psychedelic and medical marijuana research. Major news organizations also often look to social networks for comments from their online followers, giving a powerful voice to anyone with a Facebook or Twitter account.

People use Facebook, Twitter, and similar platforms in order to share what they are passionate about and interested in with friends, family, and groups, and commonly tag their friends to alert them about new and relevant information. This is a way to connect with each other over new knowledge, slowly (and sometimes quickly) increasing public perception about psychedelic research.

In December of 2013, MAPS staff participated in a reddit “Ask Me Anything” session, in which people from around the world submitted questions about psychedelics to our staff. The Q&A thread quickly rose to the front page of reddit, generating over 2,000 questions and 75 replies from the MAPS staff. This was our attempt to take one day to provide honest education



about psychedelics and marijuana to as many people as possible, and it worked. The positive response did not go unnoticed, as we began to receive news coverage about our reddit education efforts.

Our Facebook growth has been accelerating faster and faster since we first joined in July 2009. Weeks with over 1,000 new “Likes” on our Facebook page are not uncommon. In 2013, we added over 100 videos to our YouTube video channel, many of them from our Psychedelic Science 2013 conference. In just the last six months, viewers watched over 16,500 hours of educational content on our YouTube channel.

April 2013 marked the official launch of the MAPS Forums on Bluelight ([bluelight.org](http://bluelight.org)), the largest online community dedicated to active communication about the risks and benefits of drugs. With over 250,000 members, Bluelight is an open, well-moderated education and harm reduction resource. Other popular online forums including the Shroomery, DMT-Nexus, and Drugs-Forum also host strong communities that share new information about drugs and drug use.

There exists a growing array of online networks and resources for people to receive accurate information and help regarding drugs. TripSit ([tripsit.me](http://tripsit.me)), an online harm reduction network, features volunteers available at all times to provide live harm reduction via a chat service. “We know of a couple users who would not be alive if not for the hard work of our staff,” explain TripSit co-administrators Eric Hoftiezer (Teknos) and Luke Slater (reality).

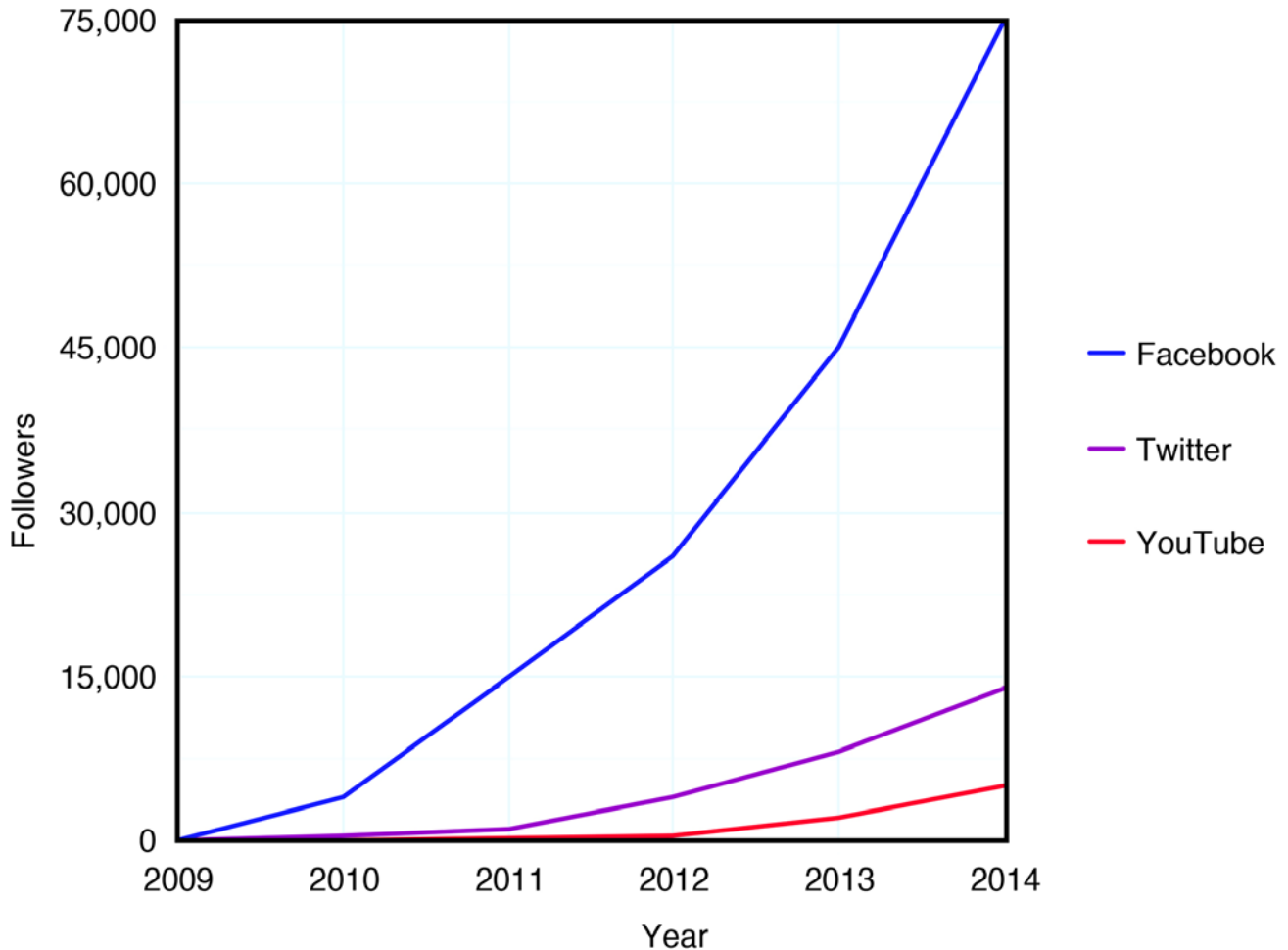
Reddit’s /r/drugs community has over 150,000 subscribers that discuss the risks and benefits of all drugs. News is shared, trends are analyzed, and information is freely disseminated with a focus on accurate sources. The reddit community prides itself on its inclusionary practices. “Nobody is excluded,” explains Borax, an /r/drugs moderator. “Anyone can comment, and any drug can be discussed.”

Social media has also given us new ways to raise funds for psychedelic and medical marijuana research. Crowdfunding sites like Indiegogo and emerging cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin allow supporters innovative ways to contribute to our research and education programs.

MAPS launched our first Indiegogo campaign to raise funds to bring our Zendo Project harm reduction services to Burning Man in 2013. We created a video, rewards, and a compelling campaign before launching to the public. Our initial goal was \$10,000, which we met in just 11 days. This initial momentum carried us through three Stretch Goals, enabling us to purchase a network of two-way radios, provide CPR/First Aid certification to volunteers, and install a solar-powered cooling system. Over the course of our 30-day campaign, our supporters contributed a total of \$17,786, far exceeding our expectations. Building excitement through social media and making projects like the Zendo possible is literally thrilling.

Encouraged by the success of the Zendo Project Indiegogo campaign, on November 11, 2013 (Veterans Day), we launched our second campaign, this time to help complete our ongoing

## MAPS Social Media Growth



study of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy to treat posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in veterans, firefighters, and police officers. After our 50-day campaign, we had raised over \$44,000 including direct contributions on Indiegogo, a \$10,000 matching donation, and bitcoin contributions worth over \$5,000.

Bitcoins (BTC) are a new type of digital currency that people send and receive instantly over the internet, then exchange to local currency. MAPS began accepting BTC donations at a serendipitous time ([maps.org/bitcoins](http://maps.org/bitcoins)). The day before our reddit “Ask Me Anything” session, we received our first bitcoin donation from an eager donor. In the midst of the AMA, we began receiving additional questions about BTC donations, so we created a bitcoin page and notified the reddit community. Since we began accepting BTC on December 3, 2013, over 65 donors have donated more than 41.12253776 BTC, which we immediately exchanged for \$30,220.77 USD. On January 10, an anonymous supporter offered to match the next 10 BTC donated to MAPS; within a week 22 donors responded and met the entire match. “As the Internet gave psychedelics a voice, Bitcoins gave the Internet a wallet,” says Brian Brown of MAPS.

As websites and services rise and fall, it is important that honest, fact-based educational content about psychedelics and marijuana remains freely open and available. This is why MAPS will continue to expand our educational resources to as many new platforms as possible, and to experiment with new forms of online education. If you proudly support MAPS and want to help accelerate change, use your favorite social network to educate others and help prove how powerful the voice of a movement can be. 🌱

**Bryce Montgomery** is a Web and Multimedia Associate at MAPS. He studied film production at West Valley College, where he also developed an interest in marketing. Bryce joined MAPS as a Social Media Intern in the summer of 2011, bringing his background in film production and social media to public education about psychedelics. His work at MAPS combines all of his passions; ranging from using the internet to reach people worldwide to creating visually stimulating media projects. He can be reached at [bryce@maps.org](mailto:bryce@maps.org).



# TripSit: Education and Harm Reduction on the World Wide Web

ERIC HOFTIEZER A.K.A. TEKNOS

LUKE SLATER A.K.A. REALITY



*Eric Hoftiezer, a.k.a. Teknos*



*Luke Slater, a.k.a. reality*

tripsit.me



TRIPSIT IS A DRUG-RELATED harm reduction network that was formed on Reddit back in 2011, for the purpose of aiding people under the influence of drugs who were having a difficult time. Since our humble beginnings, the community has grown to include an IRC network, a social media network, and a Wiki. We are, at our core, a network of caring people who for various reasons enjoy spending our free time assisting others—we strive to educate users, in order to reduce the amount of individual and societal harm caused by drug misinformation and misuse.

Due to the lack of widespread, non-biased drug education in our society, we are forced to operate under the assumption that anyone who wants to ingest a particular substance will find a way, even if they are ignorant of its effects or potential dangers. Unfortunately, these circumstances often lead to less than desirable outcomes. Our aim is simply to provide these people with a safe place to come without fear of judgment or persecution and hopefully educate them in the process, as well as providing resources which allow people to make informed decisions (such as [combo.tripsit.me](http://combo.tripsit.me) and [tripbot.tripsit.me/factsheet](http://tripbot.tripsit.me/factsheet)).

We connect people of all ages from around the world together with a common goal of wanting as many people as possible to have access to information, which allows them to use substances in a safe and responsible manner. Many people ask why this is important and or necessary—but all it takes is a look at the mass media, the education system, and countless forum posts to see the prevalence of harm caused by misinformation and ignorance in regards to drug use. Through proper education and outreach, we believe that it is entirely possible to have positive experiences from psychedelics and other drugs.

We feel the work we do is important because we recognize that for many reasons, people often cannot be open about their

drug use to those they interact with in their daily lives. This leaves them unable to ask the questions or do the research they need to in order to be informed enough to use a substance as safely as possible. Our existence makes it less likely that these people are going to make a dangerous mistake one day, such as overdosing or combining drugs that could result in serious adverse effects.

We encourage honest and open discussion about all topics ranging from serious themes like drugs, addiction, and mental health to lighter hearted topics including music and current events.

The TripSit community prides itself in having a tight knit group of members who enjoy coming back each day to volunteer their free time and offer advice to help out complete strangers in need. Our TripSitters work tirelessly every day to help other people avoid the pitfalls that many of us have experienced at one time or another.

Feel free to stop by and check us out at [tripsit.me](http://tripsit.me). 🌐

**Eric Hoftiezer** is founder and manager of the TripSit organization. He is a philosopher who believes that shamanistic techniques can be combined with today's technology to achieve great results, and that through acceptance of non-traditional practices we can further understand ourselves and our fellow mankind. He can be reached at [admin@tripsit.me](mailto:admin@tripsit.me).

**Luke Slater** runs the technical side of TripSit, and assists Eric with management and project work. He is a British student who believes that through proper education and societal change we can reduce the harm from drugs, and even begin to view them as a potentially positive force for many purposes. He can be reached at [admin@tripsit.me](mailto:admin@tripsit.me).



Earth and Fire Erowid

# Erowid Update: New Drugs, New Challenges, New Technologies

EARTH EROWID  
FIRE EROWID

## EROWID'S EDUCATIONAL MISSION

Erowid Center's mission is to develop and provide accurate information about psychoactive plants, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and technologies in order to educate, improve health, and encourage beneficial cultural reform. We directly educate the public about psychoactive substances—from legal caffeinated beverages to prescription pharmaceutical painkillers, from nicotine to MDMA and LSD. Erowid presents information from a non-judgmental viewpoint in a new paradigm that isn't intended to convince people to abstain, but instead provides the data necessary for them to make their own rational choices.

## PRACTICAL, SPECIFIC, AND RELIABLE

Erowid Center delivers practical educational information to the public through both digital and print publications. Over the past eighteen years, the **Erowid.org** website has evolved into one of the world's top internationally respected libraries of information about psychoactive plants and drugs. It contains a growing collection of more than 63,000 documents about these substances, covering topics that include: history; effects; dosage; legal status; chemistry; pharmacology; images; traditional, spiritual and medicinal use; benefits and harms; media coverage; research results; personal experiences; bibliographic and web resources; and drug use statistics. In 2013, more than sixteen million unique visitors used Erowid's online resources.

## NOVEL DRUGS, NEW CHALLENGES

Educating people about the constant flow of new drugs available in online markets is one of our major ongoing projects. In 2012 alone, 73 new drugs were reported by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. In 2013, **EcstasyData.org** (Erowid's street drug testing project) saw 42 substances new to our testing program. Further, our internal tracking of vendor sites shows over 80 different research chemicals currently available for purchase.

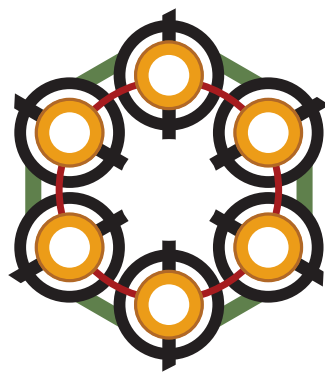
Traditional drug information sources focus on substances that have been widely used for decades. But, the natural outcome of prohibition is an unending progression of novel, more potent, and less tested drugs. In order to reduce the harms associated with the use of new drugs, we monitor the situation through volunteers, forums, and medical professionals; analyze chemicals through EcstasyData.org; coordinate between interested parties; and publish practical information.

In a world filled with materials and technologies that affect the mind, adults need robust education and accurate, pragmatic information in order to take charge

of their of their relationships with psychoactives and teach young people how to do the same from an early age.

## EDUCATING THE EDUCATORS







Erowid is dedicated to helping both the public and profession-



**Erowid Center**

[erowid.org](http://erowid.org)

Erowid's EcstasyData street drug analysis project is updated weekly at [ecstasydata.org](http://ecstasydata.org).

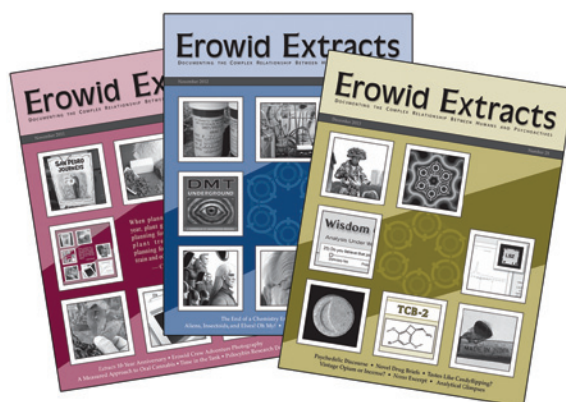
ecstasydata.org Providing access to lab testing results for street ecstasy tablets				
Photo	Tablet Name	Active Contents		Location
		Substance	Ratio	
	<a href="#">White Puma 5FVSP</a>	MDMA Methamphetamine	4 1	San Francisco, CA
	<a href="#">Blue Monkey Paul Frank</a>	Caffeine MDMA	1.3 1	San Francisco, CA
	<a href="#">White Tablet 8ATM8 (Not Sold As Ecstasy)</a>	2C-I-NBOMe	1	San Francisco, CA
	<a href="#">Red Heart 54321</a>	Caffeine TFMPP Acetaminophen BZP Methamphetamine	2 1.5 1 1 1	Oakland, NJ
	<a href="#">Green Apple 77755</a>	PMA Caffeine	1 trace	Ireland
	<a href="#">Question Mark</a>	MDMA	1	San Diego, CA

als educate themselves about psychoactive drugs. As students gain knowledge of the complex world of psychoactive drugs through sources like Erowid.org, curriculum developers are compelled to improve academic programs.

Our rich and nuanced approach is useful for educators and parents who want to offer a practical, more refined message about psychoactive drugs to young people. We provide independent educational materials for teachers and professors—from elementary to graduate school—who might otherwise rely on politically-driven drug education programs. Educators around the world make use of our resources and we regularly hear from teachers and students who tell us that Erowid.org is on the required reading list for their courses.

### EARLY 2014 UPDATE

There are a number of other projects we're working on in early 2014. We recently finished a chapter for an academic book about Kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*), as well as the foreword to a new digital book about psychedelic care services at festivals. The next issue of Erowid Extracts will include an analysis of our first Wisdom Cycle survey, which asks elders what lessons about psychedelics they would like to pass along to younger generations. Our EcstasyData street drug analysis project has ramped up to publishing results every week.



The Erowid team has just completed the first 600 abstracts for the 5000-document Stolaroff Collection. We now have a template in place so we can bring in volunteers to help us in the final steps of creating a publicly searchable database of this psychedelic researcher's letters and papers. Finally, we are working to improve Erowid.org's functionality on mobile devices, to make sure our educational resources are available to those accessing data through their smart phones. 📱

**Erowid Center** ([erowid.org](http://erowid.org)) is a US-based 501(c)(3) educational non-profit organization founded in 1995. Earth and Fire Erowid are the co-founders of Erowid Center and currently serve as the Technical Director and Executive Director of the organization. Both Fire and Earth have studied psychoactive plants and drugs since the early 1990s. They have written thousands of pages of information about these substances, have spoken internationally at numerous academic and professional conferences, and in 2011, received the Drug Policy Alliance's Dr. Andrew Weil Award for Achievement in the Field of Drug Education. They can be reached at [earth@erowid.org](mailto:earth@erowid.org) and [fire@erowid.org](mailto:fire@erowid.org).



# Students for Sensible Drug Policy Working to End the War on Psychedelics

RANDOLPH HENCKEN  
SAM TRACY



*Randolph Hencken*



*Sam Tracy*



[ssdp.org](http://ssdp.org)

IT APPEARS WE ARE FINALLY at the beginning of the end of the War on Drugs. This is especially clear to those of us whose social media feeds are filled with news about the momentum to legalize marijuana and medical marijuana, changes in laws offering compassionate alternatives to incarceration for drug addicts, and new government-approved psychedelic research. What in the current zeitgeist has finally brought the majority of people to believe that marijuana should be legal and that the War on Drugs is a failure? The rise of an organized youth movement, led by Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP), has been a substantial contributing factor in this vital change.

Founded in 1998 by students at Rochester Institute of Technology, George Washington University, and American University, SSDP initially set out to fight back against a provision in the Higher Education Act (HEA) that barred students with drug convictions from receiving federal financial aid. Today, SSDP boasts approximately 30,000 alumni, and 3,000 current students in chapters on more than 200 campuses in 43 U.S. states and 13 other countries across the globe. While we weren't able to entirely repeal the HEA's aid elimination provision, we did roll it back significantly. The upside of this policy that has blocked over 200,000 students from federal financial aid is that it also spawned an army of young people determined to end the War on Drugs. Many of those college students have gone on to become leaders in the drug policy reform movement.

SSDP is dedicated to ending the entire War on Drugs—we are not just a “pot club” and we work on much more than cannabis reform. While legalizing marijuana is a high priority, readers of the *MAPS Bulletin* may be surprised to learn that many of our members “turn on” to reform via their interest in psychedelics. As a grassroots organization, dozens of new students contact our staff each month, and one of the first questions we ask is what sparked their interest in reform. What we find is that reforming laws regarding psychedelics is drawing even more new students into the drug policy reform movement than legalizing marijuana or lowering the drinking age. In fact, MAPS is cited more than any other allied organization as the reason new students come to SSDP to start a new chapter. As marijuana reform eases into the mainstream, more opportunities will open up for SSDP and MAPS to work together to end the War on Psychedelics.

Young people hear about SSDP when we attend or table at events such as the Psychedelic Science conferences. Often, enthusiastic students contact MAPS directly hoping to get involved, and MAPS staff connect them with SSDP since we are better equipped to manage a large network of students. Thanks to this strong relationship, numerous chapters bring MAPS speakers to campus to teach students about the science and politics of psychedelics, and MAPS Founder Rick Doblin has spoken at many of our regional and national conferences. Many SSDP students go on to become passionate reformers, changing campus policies or helping reform municipal, state, and federal laws.



*Student attendees gather for a group picture at the 2012 International Students for Sensible Drug Policy Conference in Denver, Colorado.*

A few all-star SSDPers have even gone on to work at MAPS after graduation, using the skills they learned as campus activists for psychedelic research and reform. Randolph Hencken, one of the authors of this article and MAPS Director of Communications from 2008–2011, first became aware of SSDP while attending a talk by renowned artist and MAPS supporter Alex Grey. There, a nurse conducting a psychedelic research study at UCLA encouraged Randolph to get involved with SSDP while he attended San Diego State University. For him, SSDP was a platform from which he could openly express his views about the harms of prohibition and the benefits of psychedelic therapy. Perhaps even more importantly, SSDP plugged him into the national network of reformers where he was able to make the connections that supported his growth in the reform movement.

Randolph was preceded at MAPS by Jag Davies, also an SSDP alumnus. “SSDP isn’t just your run-of-the-mill student group,” Jag told us when we spoke to him about this article. “It exposed me to the depth and breadth of drug policy reform issues. SSDP has played a crucial role in all my subsequent work over the past decade with MAPS, the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], and now the Drug Policy Alliance.”

“I learned of MAPS and their great work through my participation in SSDP,” says Troy Dayton, co-founder of SSDP and current CEO of The Arcview Group, an investment firm with strong roots in the legal marijuana industry. “I learned via SSDP that one could have a career in drug policy and research. The skills and connections I built at SSDP helped land me my job as Director of Development at MAPS [2007–2008].”

“SSDP was where the rubber met the road for me as a young activist,” recalls former MAPS Development Associate Brian Wallace. “I found the praxis of academia and personal beliefs in organizing numerous events on campus, honing my fundraising skills, and figuring out how to keep myself and my fellow chapter members involved and inspired.”

Many other SSDP alumni are continuing their psychedelic activism in other ways. University of Northern Colorado chapter alumnus Chris Pezza re-started Palenque Norte, an organization devoted to creating spaces for visionary thinkers to share their ideas, which was originally inspired by a 1999

lecture series with Terence McKenna, Jonathan Ott, and Sasha Shulgin near the Mayan ruins outside of Palenque, Mexico. The Palenque Norte series put psychedelics in the spotlight, starting at the 2003 Burning Man festival. In 2012, after a five-year hiatus, Chris restarted the series and is now bringing the talks beyond Burning Man to provide more public opportunities to discuss entheogens and related topics.

In 2012, late SSDP alumnus Daniel Jabbour, from the Stevens Institute of Technology chapter, founded the Psychedelic Society of San Francisco, which works to create safe spaces to foster education, discussion, and community between consciousness-seekers [article on page 35]. “Stumbling upon SSDP in college was one of the single largest influences of my young adult life,” Daniel said. “Through SSDP, not only did I learn about drug policy, but also about human rights, immigration policy, criminal justice reform, health care policy...there aren’t many areas of public policy that drug policy doesn’t touch. I also credit SSDP with helping to develop my leadership and communication skills and tactics to be able to engage intelligently in a dialogue on the issue with anyone.”

Through SSDP’s AMPLIFY Project, we connect student activists with musicians who support ending the War on Drugs. While students advertise for local shows and tour stops, the band allows SSDPers to table at the venue and often give a short speech on stage. Students involved in AMPLIFY focus on spreading the word about our organization and cause, and often even engage in direct service to the musical community. For example, at the 2013 Tomorrowworld music festival in Georgia, AMPLIFY volunteers worked with DanceSafe and others to provide harm reduction services for people using psychedelics or other drugs. In February 2014, MAPS Harm Reduction Coordinator Linnae Ponté led a remote training for several of our AMPLIFY volunteers to help them be better equipped at future events.

Sam Tracy, one of the authors of this article and current Chairman of SSDP, joined the drug policy reform movement due to his interest in harm reduction, and became passionate about psychedelics reform after watching videos of MAPS speakers at a chapter meeting. He is particularly interested in easing the restrictions on research and use of MDMA, and



*Northeastern University SSDP hosts a panel with MAPS Executive Director, Rick Doblin, about ongoing psychedelic research and therapy.*



*University of Maryland SSDP chapter leader, Nico Orduz, performs outreach to prospective students at the 2014 International Students for Liberty Conference in Washington, DC last February.*

works to educate the public about the realities of the drug. His freshman year, he wrote an op-ed for the University of Connecticut student newspaper advocating for research into the medical uses of psychedelics. In November 2013, he appeared on NPR's *The Colin McEnroe Show* for an episode about the risks and rewards of MDMA, advocating for a regulated market as a safer alternative to our current prohibitionist approach.

SSDP views ending the War on Drugs as our generation's most important civil rights movement. During the 1960s, youth organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were leaders in ending systematic government-sanctioned racial discrimination. Today, SSDPers are continuing that fight for justice and equality, working to end the systematic government-sanctioned criminalization of certain people who use certain drugs.

For more than 15 years, SSDP has fostered students to stand up against the War on Drugs, to educate their peers and parents, and to continue their fight against drug prohibition after graduation. Like MAPS, SSDP is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization only able to operate on the generosity of those

who contribute to our organization. We invite you to support SSDP today, and to give whatever amount you are comfortable donating. If you are a student, please join our movement, and if you are an SSDP alumnus, please stay involved through our alumni network. 🌐

**Randolph Hencken** is the Executive Director at The Seasteading Institute, a nonprofit think-tank enabling the creation of floating cities in international waters where people will be free to experiment with new societies and innovative forms of government. He serves on the Board of Directors of SSDP, and was MAPS' Director of Communications from 2008-2011. He can be reached at [randy@seasteading.org](mailto:randy@seasteading.org).

**Sam Tracy** is Chairman of the Board at Students for Sensible Drug Policy, and was elected to the Board in March 2012. He works as the Communications Coordinator for TechFreedom, a technology policy think-tank working to promote innovation and protect civil liberties in the digital world. He can be reached at [sam@ssdp.org](mailto:sam@ssdp.org).



# Psychedelic Society Goes Global

DANIEL JABBOUR



Daniel Jabbour

*Editor's Note: In April 2014, shortly after completing this article, my dear friend and colleague Daniel Jabbour passed away. His death was a shock to his entire community. Daniel was a respected leader and a role model for many of us working to create spaces for open and honest conversations about psychedelics. We are profoundly grateful to Daniel for so bravely articulating his vision, and for inspiring those of us still here to carry that vision forward. If you would like to start a Psychedelic Society chapter where you live, please contact [info@psysociety.org](mailto:info@psysociety.org).*

PSYCHEDELICS ARE AT LEAST AS popular today as they were in the 1960s, an era often thought of as the psychedelic revolution. We're now in the midst of a psychedelic resurgence, but it is distinctly different from the countercultural movement of the previous century. When I founded the Psychedelic Society of San Francisco a little over two years ago, our mission was clear: to spread unbiased education and information throughout the world, and to help bring the psychedelic community together and engage in a dialogue.

Our San Francisco chapter now has over 5,000 members receiving our updates. As the psychedelic community grows larger every day across the rest of the world, we search for ways to retain our sense of connection. There's always been a vibrant international psychedelic festival scene exemplified by events such as Burning Man and Boom, but as psychedelics reach into the mainstream, we need to create more safe spaces for dialogue and for integrating lessons learned during psychedelic experiences into our everyday life. The fact that our San Francisco chapter grew so quickly shows just how hungry the community is for this dialogue.

## BRINGING TOGETHER

There's safety in numbers, and the Psychedelic Society of San Francisco is showing just how deep and wide the psychedelic community really is. Doctors, lawyers, software engineers, artists, scientists, and hippies alike are all members of the group. It's rare in Western society to see elders respected and dialogues between young and old, but our events are built on mutual respect between generations, each having wisdom and knowledge to bring to the table. Elders draw from decades of experience, while youth often keep up with modern scientific research and know about the benefits and risks of new compounds.

Psychedelics have only been illegal for a short time in human history, as many traditional cultures have sanctioned psychedelic use for hundreds of years. Take ayahuasca—in indigenous cultures that drink the brew, we find ritual, context, and initiation, usually within religious settings. The religious context provides a system for learning, a dialogue between the elders of the community and the youth, and a guide to help integrate or interpret the experiences.

LSD and MDMA both started off as medically accepted psychotherapy drugs, and some therapists used the drugs on hundreds of patients before they were made illegal. While they were criminalized in an attempt to control the counterculture, today we see new waves of neo-shamans and self-styled healers popping up all over the world. In the San Francisco Bay Area, we see this expansion most evidently as small groups routinely use ayahuasca and other psychedelics for ceremonial and healing purposes.

The practice is so prevalent that one member of our group reported, "I was walking down the sidewalk and overheard someone talking about drinking ayahuasca at a studio in my neighborhood." What will happen as this expansion continues? When will we have a search engine like Yelp for psychedelic medicine circles? How about ethics guidelines or practices? Or a system for reporting sexual abuse or other inappropriate behavior? Just as in psychotherapy, when working with psychedelics in a ceremonial way, power dynamics exist that require ethical consideration. A major goal of the Psychedelic Society is to facilitate such discussions in a public forum by bringing the community together at our events.

## COMING OUT

The drug policy community builds upon and stands on the shoulders of the gay rights and other social justice movements that have seen tremendous strides in recent decades. And the gay rights movement has seen such success in large part due to "coming out." This same phrase is often used by people who are afraid to tell their family or employer just how important psychedelics have been in their lives.

Social justice movements don't succeed until they have a face, and psychonauts won't have a face until we stand up and tell our family, neighbors, and friends about our own experiences. Of course, as MAPS and others work to develop psychedelics into legal medicines, we'll see even more "coming out" of subjects who were treated in the initial studies. But the vast majority of psychedelic users aren't diagnosed with a mental illness.

It's much harder to dismiss an uncle, brother, or childhood friend who has been benefited medically, psychologically, or spiritually from psychedelics.

If you decide to come out of the psychedelic closet: Be yourself, be educated, and talk about your own experience as much as you can. It doesn't hurt to point out that FDA-approved clinical research is taking place with multiple psychedelics.

Just last week, the Psychedelic Society helped promote a Change.org petition calling on President Obama to pardon a drug offender who is serving two life sentences on

an LSD charge. In less than a week, the petition collected over 250,000 signatures. The fact that a quarter million Americans are willing to tell the President that it's not okay to lock someone up for the rest of their life because of LSD is encouraging, and further demonstrates the power of the new psychedelic community.

## PROTECT THE CHILDREN

Despite all these wonderful advances, the War on Drugs is still causing significant harm. America has one of the highest drinking ages, and has exported its restrictive drug policies around the world. While these policies are often justified under the banner of "protect the children," drug use rates in America remain among the highest in the world. Studies show that U.S. high school students find cannabis is easier to obtain than alcohol, and smoke twice as much as their Dutch counterparts.

Drugs have very real dangers, and psychedelics aren't for everyone, but when our education system lies to young people, we leave young people without a mainstream, honest information source and not knowing who or what to believe. This further necessitates the need to develop modern rituals and social contexts that open up the dialogue between young people and their parents about the potential risks and value of psychedelic use.

As the Psychedelic Society started growing, we received multiple emails from parents who were confused about how to help their children who had difficult psychedelic experiences. There is a great need to provide a safe space for parents to discuss the issue, which in many cases could include referrals into the mental health community. It can be challenging to find doctors who are willing or capable of working with psychedelic users. All too often, traditional abstinence-focused medical professionals refuse to treat someone until they "stop using drugs."

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*If you decide to  
come out of the  
psychedelic closet:  
Be yourself, be  
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about your own  
experiences.*

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*Psychedelic Society founder Daniel Jabbour with Alexander "Sasha" Shulgin, the discoverer of the therapeutic effects of MDMA.*



The Psychedelic Society at the 2013 International Drug Policy Reform conference in Denver, Colorado.

Part of educating young people about drugs includes harm reduction. The Psychedelic Society is working to make drug testing kits more available in our communities in order to reduce the risks of mislabeled compounds or unknown analogue drugs, which become more common as law enforcement seizures temporarily make some drugs more expensive or difficult to obtain. We also hope to use the testing data to facilitate new and exciting scientific research.

## MODERN RITUAL AND SCIENCE

A recent U.S. Supreme Court decision protected the União do Vegetal church's use of ayahuasca despite its main psychedelic ingredient being DMT, a Schedule I drug. Yet in our society, science often fills the existential void of explaining the universe. While traditional cultures explained the mechanisms of these plants and compounds through religion, it's through scientific discovery that we can now introduce these compounds to mainstream Western culture. Both models of psychedelics entail initiation, context, and ritual. In today's world, it's up to us to create this ritual and context in a new way that Western culture can embrace.

This generation is shaping up to be the one that brings psychedelics into the mainstream. It's an exciting time to be a part of the community. The Psychedelic Society will continue to play a pivotal role in hosting educational events, film screenings, and discussions in order to provide a community forum and establish modern psychedelic ritual. If you would like to start a Psychedelic Society chapter where you live, please contact [info@psysociety.org](mailto:info@psysociety.org). 🌀

***Daniel Jabbour** was the founder of the Psychedelic Society and its flagship San Francisco chapter. Prior to living in San Francisco, he helped organize a similar group in NYC. In college, Daniel founded a Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP) chapter, and remained active with SSDP. He served on a Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) committee working to end NYC's marijuana arrest epidemic, and spoke at several rallies in NYC. His previous political work also included lobbying at the local and national level, and organizing student volunteers for a mayoral race in Hoboken, NJ. When he wasn't hacking on Drug Policy, he was a software engineer working on various startup projects, and mentored young hackers at Hack the Future. Daniel passed away in April 2014.*





ESC ETHNOBOTANICAL  
STEWARDSHIP  
COUNCIL

## Creating a Safe and Sustainable Ayahuasca Culture

JOSHUA WICKERHAM



*Joshua Wickerham*

**EthnobotanicalCouncil.org**

ALONG WITH MANY POSITIVE STORIES, the many risks to ayahuasca seekers and ayahuasca culture make frequent headlines. At best, cultural misunderstanding about appropriate relationships between giver and receiver lead to misunderstandings. At worst, exploitative relationships threaten ayahuasca's expanded free use. The possibilities of further repressive legislation, harmful media exposure, or senseless casualties are very real.

Given ayahuasca's global prominence and legal status in South America, we now have an opportunity to develop a post-prohibition model of ayahuasca safety and sustainability—one that protects the plants, improves the safety and reputations of people, and holds space to expand ayahuasca's place in global culture across disciplines. But how?

The Ethnobotanical Stewardship Council is a new organization devoted to this cause. We are working to transform lives by assuring the sustainability and safe use of ceremonial plants like ayahuasca, peyote, and iboga, and other traditional plants.

The ESC's flagship project is the Ayahuasca Dialogues, which will establish an "Ayahuasca Agreement" on safety and sustainability.

To be fair and useful, the multi-year Ayahuasca Dialogues to build the Ayahuasca Agreement will follow a clear, careful consensus building process modeled on the global best practices used by groups like Fairtrade or the Rainforest Alliance. We will use a clear scope, proactive outreach to disadvantaged stakeholders, and a responsive, constructive attitude to public comments.

Words like "sustainability" and "safety" are subjective and sometimes even contentious, especially in the cross-cultural contexts where ayahuasca is often consumed. Agreement on transformative social, environmental, and economic goals will take time, but the ESC's preliminary engagement already shows interest in three main areas:

First is ceremonial center safety, like preventing inappropriate touching, avoiding injury during ceremonies, and ensuring first aid preparedness.



Second is site sustainability, like paying living wages, building facilities suitable to the local environment, or planting native plants.

Third is fair and sustainable plant cultivation and wild collection, focusing on improving local education or health care, fair wages, and ensuring continued local access to plants for traditional uses.

Thanks to initial donations, the ESC is preparing to launch the formal Ayahuasca Dialogues in 2015 by hiring a local research team to interview key stakeholders in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, where ayahuasca culture is legally-recognized and protected.

The AyaDialogues will also establish transparent and voluntary mechanisms for assuring that ceremony centers and growers are living up to the Ayahuasca Agreement. We want to allow anyone willing to do the safety and sustainability work the chance to be recognized at maximum rigor and minimal cost. This will help more centers join the ESC and help more people find safe and sustainable ayahuasca centers and plant materials.

Sustainably and fairly grown plant materials will use the ESC logo at the retail level. Ceremony centers can display a rating system. Such tools will help connect seekers with responsible and sustainable sites.

We depend on and are grateful for community support. MAPS, as our fiscal sponsor in the US, accepts tax-deductible donations as we establish our own nonprofit entity. MAPS director Rick Doblin is also on the ESC's interim board. In

Europe, the International Center for Ethnobotanical Education, Research and Service (ICEERS) is acting as an incubation partner and fiscal sponsor, with their director Ben DeLoenen also on the board.

We are currently fundraising to be able to present comprehensive research on the social, economic, political, and environmental aspects of sustainable and safe ayahuasca leading up to the World Ayahuasca Conference in Ibiza, Spain this September. This research sets the stage for the formal Ayahuasca Dialogues while using the language of economics, policy, and science to give the plants and their stewards the widest support possible from leaders in business, government, health, tourism, agroecology, sustainable development, and drug policy reform communities.

We look forward to the dialogue!

Read more at [EthnobotanicalCouncil.org](http://EthnobotanicalCouncil.org). 

***Joshua Wickerham** founded the Ethnobotanical Stewardship Council. For over a decade, Joshua has worked around the world designing and implementing transparent and participatory international governance systems that balance economic prosperity with social and environmental sustainability. Joshua has a BA from the University of Michigan and master's in international relations from UC San Diego. In his spare time, Joshua tends an Urban Micro Garden at his home in Thailand and explores historical Chinese ethnopharmacology. He can be reached at [joshua@ethnobotanicalcouncil.org](mailto:joshua@ethnobotanicalcouncil.org).*

# Testimonial: How Psychedelics Changed My Perspective as a Police Recruit

ANONYMOUS

*The following testimonial was provided to MAPS by an anonymous supporter. The author's experience with psilocybin demonstrates how, with education and awareness, people can change their perspectives on the War on Drugs and their own role in society.*

WHEN I WAS A SOPHOMORE in high school, I was recruited by the local police department to join the student police academy. After the 12-week course, I was asked to join the police department as a cadet. I accepted the invitation and at 15 years old, I started riding along with the police while wearing a uniform and a bulletproof vest. They gave me a radio and a call sign and made me feel like I was part of the gang.

The adrenaline rush of speeding around the city with our lights flashing and sirens blaring instantly swept me up. The mix of power tripping and male dominated camaraderie was an addictive cocktail for a young teen and I became obsessed with police culture. I decided to focus on a career in law enforcement so I began to conform to the image of a perfect recruit.

Over the course of high school, I became quite unpopular with my peers who often found themselves on the other end of the police baton. But I didn't care about what my classmates thought; law enforcement culture gave me self-worth, along with an inflated ego and a strong sense of superiority.

Then I went to college where my police persona became even less popular. I struggled to find affirmation from my peers toward my projected career as a cop, and I started to have doubts

about my police path. In this new phase of indecision, my friends encouraged me to try psilocybin mushrooms. I went for it and took a heavy dose. My inflated police ego popped and four years of dark emotions started to flow out of my subconscious. I reprocessed memories of arresting non-violent drug offenders and witnessing police brutality. I realized that through my experience in the police department, I unknowingly developed strong mechanisms for emotional repression. The police had trained me to numb my heart to the heartbreak they often inflicted. Until the mushrooms, I was unable to empathize with the victims of the prison industrial complex. With these emotional floodgates open, lots of guilt started to flow. I had been getting a "power-high" at the expense of numerous non-violent victims of our broken justice system.

After lots of painful processing, I felt a euphoric enlightenment from my new reality. For the first time in my life, I was able to conceptualize my spirit. I reflected on seeing my fellow officers arrest and incarcerate people for the same substances that helped me develop my spirituality. I felt like

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my fellow officers  
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my spirituality.*

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two halves of me were split between a life of law enforcement and one of psychedelic introspection. Then I discovered MAPS and fell in love with their mission to mainstream psychedelics. They helped me find this middle ground of bridging the gap between these two worlds. Although I decided not to become a police officer, I still have many relationships within the police department, and I am trying to shift their perspective towards the potential for therapeutic uses of psychedelics. 🌀



# Prison Education from the Inside Out: An Interview with Casey William Hardison

WITH BRAD BURGE



Casey William Hardison

THE FIRST THING YOU NOTICE about Casey William Hardison is his winning smile. It's a huge grin for a man who has spent the last decade of his (still young) life locked in a prison cell in a foreign country.

In April 2005, Casey was convicted and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment under the United Kingdom's Misuse of Drugs Act for manufacturing and distributing LSD, DMT, and 2C-B. On May 29, 2013, after serving almost ten years of his sentence—3,395 days, by Casey's count—he received “conditional release” and was deported from the UK.

After his release, Casey returned to the United States with his English wife, Charlotte Walsh, and promptly got as far away from cages and walls as he could. Now, he's living in a cabin in the Idaho wilderness near Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. When we last spoke he was making extreme ski and snowboarding films, and watching deer, geese, and the occasional moose in his yard.

Long before his legal trouble began, Casey had already started using his own experience to illuminate new (sometimes psychopharmacological) pathways and challenge dominant ways of thinking. That's actually the second thing you notice about Casey: his spirit is unconquerable.

Prior to his incarceration, Casey was a contributor to the *MAPS Bulletin* (“An Amateur Qualitative Study of 48 2C-T-7 Subjective Bioassays,” Summer 2000), as well as to *The Entheogen Review* and Erowid. He's currently writing a chapter entitled “Cognitive Liberty: The Right to Alter My Mental Functioning” for Tom Roberts and Harold Ellens' forthcoming book *The Psychedelic Policy Quagmire*, and beginning a bimonthly column for Erowid.

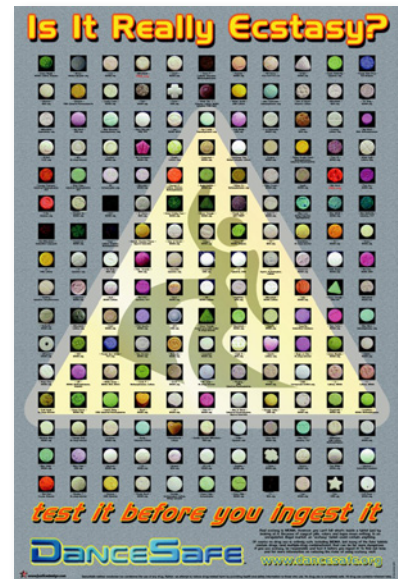
I spoke with Casey (and Charlotte) one warm and misty afternoon at the MAPS offices in Santa Cruz in July 2013. Casey had contacted us shortly after his release and offered to share his story, to help cast a bright light on both the terrors of the drug war and the promise of transformed perspectives. What follows is an edited transcript of our conversation.

*Fiat lux!*

★

**BRAD BURGE (BB):** Can you give me a little background about how you came to learn about psychedelic research, and what first got you interested in drug policy?

**CASEY WILLIAM HARDISON (CWH):** I got interested in drug policy quite early on. I realized there was something funky about it as soon as I started being targeted by the War on Some People Who Use Some Drugs. I think it's actually Jonathan Ott's phrase, but it was used by the November Coalition ([november.org](http://november.org)) as well. It



Casey received the MAPS Bulletin, The Entheogen Review, and other publications, which often served as conversation starters while he was in prison.

just always struck me as another form of discrimination that is not focused on by the majority of people. The people who tend to focus on it, and understand it, are those that are actually using the drugs that are not preferred by the majority, although cannabis is becoming preferred by the majority.

**BB:** Is there something that separates the drugs that are preferred by the majority and drugs that are outcast?

**CWH:** I would actually say that some of the drugs that are preferred by the majority cloud one's judgment and do not have one looking at the unconscious contents of their mind. Some of the drugs that are not preferred by the majority, psychedelics in particular, have you look at the unconscious contents of your mind. I certainly looked at my mind as a result of consumption of those, and started questioning authority in a way that those in the majority probably wouldn't appreciate.

I don't want to create an "us and them" out of it, but the people that made the legislation for the drug war, that became the culture war, were probably concerned with the health and safety of their children and thought they were doing the best thing. It turned out many years later that probably wasn't correct. If you read [David F.] Musto's [1973] book on the origins of the drug war, *The American Disease*, you can see that the early movement for the Opium Wars in particular was simply economic, a way of keeping Britain out of the market with China. For it to continue to this day, it still seems economic. It seems like a way for the U.S. military and its friends to get involved

in countries so that they can control resources and people. The idea that we're spending so much money to imprison two million people for drug offenses alone in the United States seems absolutely ridiculous.

**BB:** When was the first time you felt you were personally a target of this drug war?

**CWH:** The first time I got arrested was in my car on the Fourth of July, celebrating freedom, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in downtown Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. I got pulled over and I had a small jar, a glass handmade blown glass jar from a friend of mine with marijuana in it, and they didn't like that, so they arrested me. This was '94 or '95, and I realized this was not going to stop. This was going to keep going until people stood up and said, "No, this is not acceptable." I think that's when I first realized that I was a target, properly a target. I mean, there were hints that I was a target as soon as I started proclaiming I was going to school to make drugs. People were like, "Shhhh, don't tell anyone," and I knew then that I was involved in something that was going to leave me subject to the law.

**BB:** So why, when you felt the hard hammer of this law coming at you, did you not say, "Okay, I'm just not going to use weed anymore," or "I'm just going to go find another career?"

**CWH:** I doubt I could have articulated it at the time, but I thought what they were doing was wrong; I knew it wasn't fair. They can grow their weed—tobacco—and they can sell it to



*The so-called ‘war on drugs’ is not a war on pills, powder, plants, and potions, it is war on mental states—a war on consciousness itself—how much, what sort we are permitted to experience, and who gets to control it. More than an unintentional misnomer, the government-termed ‘war on drugs’ is a strategic decoy label; a slight-of-hand move by the government to redirect attention away from what lies at ground zero of the war—each individual’s fundamental right to control his or her own consciousness.”—Richard Glen Boire, “On Cognitive Liberty”*

everybody, and yet I can’t grow this weed and smoke it. It just didn’t seem right. I don’t think I could articulate that effectively until I heard Richard Boire’s “cognitive liberty” argument: the idea that I had the right to alter my mental functioning as I see fit. I enjoy the mental states produced by cannabis and psychedelics, and I didn’t see why, if I enjoyed this and I’m not harming anyone, I should be stopped from doing so.

**BB:** How did you come across the idea of cognitive liberty?

**CWH:** I think it actually came from a pamphlet, just a simple pamphlet from the Center for Cognitive Liberty and Ethics [[cognitiveliberty.org](http://cognitiveliberty.org); formerly the Alchemind Society] in 2000. I found it on a table at the Palenque Entheobotany Seminar. I thought, that’s brilliant, this is the centerpiece, the key to unlock the whole thing, because inside the speech that we have the freedom to speak is thought, and inside that thought is so much authority and power. I don’t want to say it so simply, but the church and institutions have, over time, tended to want to control what people think.

I realize that there was just a long thread of connection through that idea. I think Jonathan Ott attempted to articulate it in the intro to *Pharmacotheon*, where I think he attempted to envision the future of religion. Thomas Roberts also talks about academic and religious freedom, and the study of mind.

I think Richard Boire took the idea and ran with it, and wrote a series of articles, and they were just epic, they were beautiful, and I was converted. I’m a shameless proselytizer as

it is, so I made up these flyers that had Alchemind on one side and MAPS on the other, and I also had Alchemind paired with Erowid flyers, so I was giving these away at all the festivals that I was going to, thousands of them.

**BB:** Around 2000, when you were handing out these flyers, MAPS was still trying to get a lot of the research started that we’re now conducting. What for you was the value of scientific research for changing the war on drugs?

**CWH:** I was promoting MAPS in particular for the experience that I had with psychedelics. I had experienced an exceptional catharsis that just felt like I cleaned out years of skeletons from my closet—you know, just put them out, a yard sale—anyone who wants them can have them. That came through my experience with LSD, but when I had my first experience with MDMA, I was absolutely blown away. I was in a world where communication became so simple, where it was so effortless to communicate with authenticity and integrity.

**BB:** Did that attitude of openness and authenticity help you while you were in prison?

**CWH:** Absolutely. Conveniently enough, in England I was able to decorate my walls as I see fit most of the time. I was receiving the *MAPS Bulletin*, *The Entheogen Review*, and other publications, and was able to put my iconography up on my wall, which often led people to wanting to talk about what that iconography meant. I had one of the back covers to one of the



*Bulletins*, the pill chart. There was a serious amount of pill-taking in England, so I could always interest the prisoners and prison staff alike. The prison staff might be wearing that nice uniform but many of them had experienced MDMA or Ecstasy, as it is in the pill form in England.

So there was always a way of bringing people into the conversation, the idea that there is healing to be found through this stuff, that you can strengthen the bonds you have in your relationships, that you can get through difficult conversations that you might be having with your friends, family, and loved ones through the use of psychedelics, or in particular MDMA. I was able to enlighten a few people directly as to the experience and effects of some psychedelics as a result of generous individuals being kind to me whilst I was in prison; that's coded, and anybody can decipher that how they wish. Most importantly, I think I promoted a spirit of open and direct communication with people.

The people that would congregate around my cell were into taking a look at their life. I mean, they were in prison, they had six walls to focus their energy. I hunted for people that seemed open, seemed like they were on the path. I'd pick 'em out, single 'em out. I'd just do that, as often as possible with anybody who could stand still long enough for me to do it. So many people in prison experienced the effects of clown shamanism, a sort of impromptu therapy, whether it was iconography or words.

**BB:** So there's a therapeutic aspect to the education that happened in prison about psychedelics?

**CWH:** Generally. I was able to take over a philosophy class in prison for a couple of weeks. I was able to teach, tutor science and math, for people that were in prison who were trying to better their lives. I did a physics degree while I was there. We had an Open University room (Open University is the distance education that supplies a lot of prisons around the world, but we had our own computers) and we'd sit in there and have conversations for long periods of time. And there was a philosophy class and people would move just to be near me, just so we could communicate.

**BB:** Did you develop lasting relationships with any of these people?

**CWH:** I think I developed probably a couple dozen lasting relationships that will endure through time. I've communicated with probably a half dozen since I've been out in the last two months, but I've been on the road. I think several of them will look me up later in time, and if I ever get back on Facebook, some of them will come find me.

**BB:** What was the first thing you wanted to do when you got out?

**CWH:** I really just wanted to sit still for a moment, just breathe the air. I wanted to head towards the wilderness eventually, get in the hot springs, make love to my lovely wife, Charlotte Walsh, and just drink clean water, eat good food.

**BB:** If you could start honest and open conversations about psychedelics even in such a challenging and hostile place as prison, that gives me a lot of hope for our culture at large. How can people best participate in changing attitudes?

**CWH:** I think the best thing individuals who are interested in shining a light on these things can do is arm themselves with accurate information—though I don't even want to say armed. I don't want to answer a drug war with a war. I want to undermine it; I want to take its foundations away. It's founded on legislation, and if we look at the legislation, we realize that only Congress has the power to make such rules, and that only

Congress is going to solve the problem.

I think that the real answers are going to come from the law. What the framers of the Controlled Substances Act in America were trying to come up with was a rigorous format for regulating the production and supply

of drugs that they thought might cause harm were they not used wisely. I can understand where they would freak out and think "Wow, they're not being used wisely," because a bunch of hippies in the '60s took them and got really wild, and caused a lot of questioning of authority. I could see how that scared them, and they wanted to grab ahold of it as fast as possible.

The law isn't written badly—it's actually a very well written law. Both the United States Controlled Substances Act and the United Kingdom's Misuse of Drugs Act, both have the ability to create under them a regulated supply of all the substances that they say are controlled now.

**BB:** Are there smaller steps that can be taken to make these big legal changes happen faster?

**CWH:** Speak honestly with your friends. Stand up and say, "I do this and I enjoy it. This has created benefit for me. I experience joy and liberation through the use of these chemicals. These molecules have shown me new ways of thinking and being." There's no more to it than that. I'm not saying go out and broadcast it to the police, but I'm saying amongst your friends and family, speak honestly and openly about it. There's nothing to be ashamed of. We are bags of chemicals walking around and we can transform the way we perform through our diet, which includes our food choices, our drink choices, our drug choices, the air we breathe, and the environment we feast on with our eyes. Our diet is not simply the food choices at the supermarket.

**BB:** So are there places and situations that you can see where people can feel comfortable sharing that?

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*There was always a way of bringing people into the conversation, the idea that there is healing to be found through the use of psychedelics.*

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**CWH:** Obviously there's festivals and things like that, but that's not going to bring everyone together. That's not going to bring all the people that we need for this conversation. There's also the idea that as we age, this becomes less and less of a problem in society, that as the old guard dies off, we get an opportunity to transform the world.

**BB:** Was there anyone in particular who you remember being able to help by educating them about psychedelics?

**CWH:** I had one particular guard who was experiencing difficulty with his son and autism, and his wife and him were having difficulty communicating about it. He was reading some stuff that I handed to him in regards to [Stanislav] Grof's "perinatal matrices," and that started an in-depth conversation that lasted for several months about his child's birth experiences, and the mother's experiences during the birth process as well. That actually led to them opening up a conversation with each other. He never told me whether they actually went out and found some MDMA, but I get the idea that they did and that they broke through the barrier that they had about their son. I think they were blaming each other for the fact that the child wasn't what they expected, but that he was perfect in the way he was created, in the way he exists. And they let go of that blame and found more peace with each other.

I also had one particular prisoner who became a very good friend of mine. He'd grown up violent, in a violent household, on the streets, and he was in for violence. He hadn't killed anyone, but he was going to if he kept on the way he was going. I started talking to him. Strangely enough, underneath all that environment, all that shell, was this person that was very gentle and very pure and innocent. I sat for him one day when he smoked some DMT, and his whole outlook just shifted. Suddenly he was like, "Wow, I don't want anything to do with that world anymore." His whole word became about educating himself about science and mind and consciousness, and how he's going to make DMT in the future.

**BB:** The fact that he was in prison already didn't affect his potential future plans to illegally manufacture drugs?

**CWH:** By sending people to prison, you're giving them a "time out" in the corner. It's an occupational hazard for so many people that it's just part of the process. In Her Majesty's Academy of Crime, you meet new connections, you establish new relationships, you network, you get out of prison, you create bigger crimes. The prison system is a wonderful way of taking dangerous criminals, and sometimes making them more dangerous, and sometimes steering them into less dangerous occupations. There are people who have been in and out of prison 30 or 40

times that I've been with, and maybe through my interactions with them they'll be in prison less and they'll create less crime.

**BB:** So by talking openly with them about psychedelics, you were giving them an alternative viewpoint that they could use to change their lives.

**CWH:** In talking with these individuals, I really was creating Temporary Autonomous Zones, safe spaces for them to speak and just be themselves, where no one was judging them, no one was telling them what to do. I wasn't telling them they were bad, wrong, dirty or shameful—which is what a lot of them were really used to—but just creating a safe space where people can just unload and be themselves. It was pretty much my job.

I read a lot of depositions of people's crimes, and some people had done some absolutely atrocious crimes that I'm glad they're in prison for, but at the same time I had to live with these people and respect them as fellow human beings, someone who breathes and shares the same space I do. I think I survived the process quite effectively and quite easily by creating an attitude of minimal judgment.

Some of the people I was in prison with had never hugged a tree, never been in nature. They were city kids their whole life. They'd never seen the beauty of the world, never been to the beach, never breathed in a beautiful sunset, and maybe through breathing in some of the stuff that I encouraged them to breathe, they might transform their way of being. Get more honest with themselves. Clean their house and help others do the same. Nobody had stood still long enough to even hear who they were, to see them, and to encourage their potential. I did that a lot, letting people know, "You're not a failure, you're not a fuck-up. There's nothing to be ashamed of. You're a human being who's learning on this path. This is where you are now." 🌀

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**Special thanks** to J Warner for volunteering to transcribe this interview.

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MAPS furthers its mission by:

- Developing psychedelics and marijuana into prescription medicines.
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- Supporting scientific research into spirituality, creativity, and neuroscience.
- Educating the public honestly about the risks and benefits of psychedelics and marijuana.

MAPS envisions a world where psychedelics and marijuana are safely and legally available for beneficial uses, and where research is governed by rigorous scientific evaluation of their risks and benefits.

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**Rick Doblin, Ph.D., Founder and Executive Director**, earned his Ph.D. in Public Policy from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Doblin was also in Stan and Christina Grof's first training group to receive certification as a Holotropic Breathwork practitioner.



**Michael Mithoefer, M.D., Clinical Investigator/Medical Monitor**, is a psychiatrist practicing in Charleston, SC, where he divides his time between clinical research and outpatient clinical practice specializing in treating posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with an emphasis on experiential methods of psychotherapy. He is a certified Holotropic Breathwork Facilitator and trained in EMDR and Internal Family Systems Therapy.



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**Brad Burge, Director of Communications and Marketing**, earned his B.A. in Communication and Psychology from Stanford University in 2005 and his M.A. in Communication from the University of California, San Diego in 2009. His graduate work focused on the political, scientific, and cultural changes required to make illicit drugs into legitimate medicines.



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**Virginia Wright, Director of Development** Prior to joining MAPS in 2011, Virginia was a marketing and fundraising consultant, and held management level positions at the Santa Cruz Symphony, KUSP Radio, The Global Fund for Women, and Soviet American Performing Arts Exchange. She earned her B.A. in International Relations from San Francisco State University, and her M.B.A. from Santa Clara University.



**Brian Brown, Communications and Marketing Associate**, studied medical anthropology and visual culture at the University of California, Santa Cruz where he researched social prospects for psychedelics using a community centered approach. Brian is now developing MAPS' membership base by assisting with education and outreach efforts.



**Kynthia Brunette, Database Consultant**, has a B.A. in Political Science, an M.S. in Human Computer Interaction, and a lifelong interest in models of personality and development. Her interests have evolved over the years into a fascination with the design of institutions, organizations, and experiences that serve as vehicles for transpersonal growth.



**Tess Goodwin, Development Assistant**, has a B.A. in Psychology from the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she focused most of her time on social psychology and newspaper production. She is a mycophile, artist, and language enthusiast.



**Colin Hennigan, Clinical Data Coordinator**, brings a background in research design methodology and database management to MAPS. He earned his B.A. in Political Science at the University of Chicago, and his M.A. in Political Science at University of California, Davis. He is currently working on the creation of MAPS' online clinical database and the implementation of the Therapist Adherence Program.



**Lisa Jerome, Ph.D., Research and Information Specialist**, earned a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Maryland. She helps design studies, gathers information on study drugs by keeping abreast of current literature and discussion with other researchers, manages documents related to MAPS-supported studies, and supports the MAPS psychedelic literature bibliography.



**Sarah Jordan, Publications Associate**, earned her B.A. in Environmental Policy with a minor in Journalism from the University of California at Santa Cruz. Prior to joining MAPS, she was Communications and Development Assistant at Firelight Foundation in Santa Cruz, CA.



**Bryce Montgomery, Web and Multimedia Associate**, studied film production at West Valley College, joining MAPS as Social Media Intern in the summer of 2011. Bryce now serves as Multimedia Associate, bringing his background in film production and social media to public education about psychedelics.



**Linnae Ponté, Executive and Clinical Research Assistant and Harm Reduction Coordinator**, earned her BA in Biological Psychology from New College of Florida. She's assisted data collection and analysis at University of South Florida's Cardiovascular Psychophysiology Laboratory, MOTE Marine Mammal Aquarium Psychophysical Laboratory, East-West College of Natural Medicine, and the West Mamprusi Civic Union in Ghana.

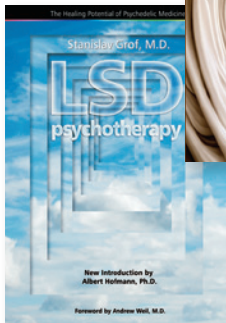
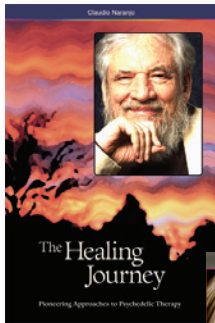


**Ben Shechet, Clinical Study Assistant**, received his BA in Psychology from Princeton University, where his work included research on motor learning in children, investigation of flow state phenomena, and a thesis that developed a neuroeconomic framework for understanding the phenomenon of boredom. Prior to joining MAPS, he worked as a Clinical Research Coordinator at a private clinical trials site, investigating potential treatments for Alzheimer's Disease.



**Berra Yazar-Klosinski, Ph.D., Clinical Research Scientist**, earned her Ph.D. in Molecular, Cell, and Developmental Biology from University of California Santa Cruz, where she also served as president of the Graduate Student Association. After attending Stanford University, she worked as a Research Associate with Geron Corporation and Millennium Pharmaceuticals.

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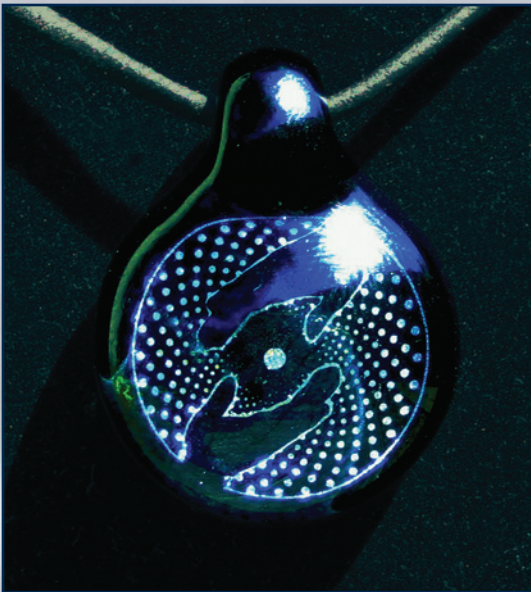
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